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# Nature-Worship and Taboo

Further Studies in "The Soul of the Bantu"

*By*

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*Dedicated to*

My friend who has made it possible  
for this book to be published

*and*

The Faculty of the Hartford  
Seminary Foundation.



## PREFACE

IN *The Soul of the Bantu* I discussed Bantu ancestor-worship, and promised to write about other Bantu magico-religious practices and beliefs. The present volume is in part fulfilment of that promise. It consists of two chapters: the first seeks to ascertain whether the Bantu pay homage also to Nature-spirits, and the second tries to grasp the Bantu conception of Taboo. Both books were written as lectures for students in The Kennedy School of Missions—men and women who are not satisfied with delicatessen literature, but spare no effort to discover for themselves what the Bantu believe and how these beliefs may be related to a nobler conception of life. Both books owe much to successive generations of Hartford students, who always called for the best that I could do and often gave me more than I gave them. The sands are running down in my hour-glass, but before it is turned I hope to complete my study of Bantu High Gods or Supreme Beings, and Bantu Magic.





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## CHAPTER

### II. TABOO

Animism (the attribution of living souls to animals and things) is another feature of Bantu religion, and Magic is its ritual. Magic is not easily understood by minds that are steeped in modern thought; but we shall find it a little less difficult if we first explore the Bantu notion of Taboo, which lies on the boundary between Magic and Ancestor-worship.

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## INTRODUCTION

THOSE who know anything of Dr. Willoughby's previous volumes on *Race Problems in the New Africa*, and *The Soul of the Bantu*, will realize in advance that a new work from his pen is an event of importance. This volume on *Nature-Spirits and Taboo* is a further contribution to our understanding of these African races which come under the general title of the Bantu.

No colonial administration, no missionary enterprise can be carried on wisely and successfully among these many millions of virile people without an intimate knowledge of their habits of thought and their social and political practices and organizations. The literature on various aspects of that vast field of inquiry is now immense. But Dr. Willoughby brings a rare equipment to his task. He spent many long years of direct, intimate and patient investigation of the life of certain Bantu tribes and has added to that an extensive acquaintance with the best literature on the subject.

When he had gained the complete confidence of that great South African chief, Khama, he explained to him that he wished to be treated as one of themselves, that he might learn thoroughly what their beliefs and practices were. The chief responded by giving orders to his people which stripped away much of that veiling of reserve with which all white men are treated by the natives. They discussed and described practices and beliefs with Dr. Willoughby which few others have been able to penetrate.

After many years of this most intimate and privileged relationship with the people of South Africa, Dr. Willoughby became in 1919 Professor of the African Department of the Kennedy School of Missions. For twelve years, while he proved himself one of the most fascinating of teachers, he was continuously working with ample library facilities upon the ever-growing literature of his chosen field. It is the conviction of those who have a right to an opinion that his own volumes on

The Bantu Soul, of which this is the second and a third is in preparation, must take their place in the front rank of those authorities whom no earnest student of the subject can afford to neglect. They combine a most thorough consideration of the reports and judgments of the leading writers with a deeply sympathetic attitude towards the native peoples of the African continent.

All those who are dealing with the political development of the African races, all those who have given their lives to missionary work among them, and all general students of anthropology, and primitive religion, will find in these volumes a very treasure house of information and illuminating interpretation.

W. DOUGLAS MACKENZIE.

## CHAPTER I

### NATURE-WORSHIP

THE theory that the worship of the heavenly bodies was the beginning of religion is now generally abandoned; but Indo-Europeans worshipped personifications of natural phenomena before the oldest of their documents were written, and some of their descendants do so still. Greeks of the classical period, captivated by Olympic traditions and passionately in love with beauty, saw superhuman beings in every aspect of nature; and European education has been smothered in Greek classics since the renaissance of learning in the 15th century. Young people go out into the world with some knowledge of Nature-worship and no knowledge of the birth and growth of religion; and when puzzled by the strange gods of lower cultures, they turn instinctively to the only form of paganism that they know anything about, and find Sun-myths, Dawn-maidens, Princes of Darkness, and kindred conceits in the most unlikely places. The best help that Greek paganism can render to the student of Bantu religion comes, not from the gods of Olympus, but from the ruins of an older culture upon which these ancient divinities built;<sup>1</sup> for the Bantu care but little for the beauty of the world and bestow their worship upon heroes of their own social groups, though professing at the same time to influence souls of people and things by magical means. Most, if not all, of those oddments in the medley of Bantu social practices that, veiled by the cobwebs of antiquity, look like trappings of Nature-worship will be found upon closer examination to be time-worn rites of approach to the mighty dead.

#### SPIRITS THAT DWELL IN THE WATERS

Bathing the body in pools and running water, pouring water on persons and arid lands, throwing water into the air, and

<sup>1</sup> See *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*. By Jane Ellen Harrison.

aspersing people and things with 'holy water', all figure in the ritual of Bantu worship and magic; but no one imagines for a moment that any nature-spirit dwells in the water that is thus used. In such cases water is either a symbol for rain or a vehicle for magical substances or potencies that are expected to remove impurities. But throughout Bantu Africa, from the Cape to the Sahara indeed,<sup>2</sup> strange pacificatory ceremonies, often quite conventional, are connected with rivers, lakes, and the real or fabulous denizens of these waters.

According to Theal's rendering of Xosa belief,<sup>3</sup> Hili, or Tikoloshe is a mischievous being who lives in the water and goes about on land as a human dwarf, playing tricks on people, milking cows when no one is watching, and seducing women. "Rivers are inhabited by demons or malignant spirits," writes another author who is familiar with tribes of this group,<sup>4</sup> "and it is necessary to propitiate them on crossing an unknown stream, by throwing a handful of corn or some other offering, even if it be of no intrinsic value, into the water. Of these spirits, the *Incanti* corresponds to the Greek python, while the *Hili* has the appearance of a very small and ugly old man, and is very malevolent. These spirits are never seen except by magicians. To an ordinary person it is certain death to see an *incanti*. When any one is drowned, the magicians say, 'He was called by the spirits', and this call no one can resist, nor is it safe to interfere to save one who is 'called' from drowning."<sup>5</sup> He says also:<sup>6</sup> "There are certain streams in which spirits reside, and women on fording them

<sup>2</sup> Before drinking from certain rivers, Hottentots throw a little offering into the water and cry to *Toosib*, a great red man with white hair, saying "O grandfather, son of a Bushman, give us food." (Quatrefages: *The Pygmies*, p. 220.) Semitic people, also, regard flowing water as a dwelling-place of spirits and an object of reverence.

<sup>3</sup> ECSA. 304.

<sup>4</sup> LA. 205-206

<sup>5</sup> People in the Bombay Presidency believe that "those who meet death by drowning or who commit suicide by drowning become spirits, residing near the scene of their death, and are a source of danger to all who approach the water.

There is a widespread belief in the Deccan that a drowning person is being claimed by the water-spirits and that any one attempting to rescue him would also become a victim." (Enthoven: *Folklore of Bombay*, 108f.) My colleague, Dr. Hodous, tells me that in China suicide is often held in high regard, but that those who commit suicide by drowning are supposed to abide near the place till they find a substitute, and that the fear of meddling with the spirit's choice of a substitute sometimes prevents bystanders from trying to rescue the drowning.

<sup>6</sup> LA. 204.

never raise their skirts, as this would offend them. When there is war, a beast is sacrificed and thrown into the stream. The sacrifice is, however, more to the dead chief as a propitiatory offering for victory, than to the spirits who inhabit the stream. This superstition, though akin to, is different from that regarding river demons, of which there are many, and all of them malign." The same writer tells us<sup>7</sup> that a Kafir woman, on the day after the ancestors have been thanked by sacrifice for her emergence from the seclusion that follows childbirth, has a charm tied round her neck and goes to the river for water. There she casts a stone into the pool and cries, 'What are you looking at? Don't look at me'; and then she throws in another stone, fills her pitcher, and carries it home upon her head, taking care not to spill the water nor to steady the pitcher with her hand. He mentions a Tikolotshe, also,<sup>8</sup> that was thought to live in a pool of the Tsitsa River. Tikolosh, or Tikolotshe (the word is variously spelt) is a spirit of the river (some say there are two of them, male and female), which sometimes 'calls' people, and often 'bites' them while they are bathing. The 'bite' of this elusive creature produces boils, rash, and possibly even leprosy; which means, I suppose, an erysipelatous condition brought on by bathing when overheated. This spirit may be propitiated by chewing a certain 'medicine' and spitting it into the water before bathing and then not looking back when leaving the river. This is a sensible prescription: it calls first for a delay that gives some chance of cooling the body before plunging it into the water, and then for a psychological adjuvant that may be trusted to stimulate the faith of magically-minded people.

It will be noticed that the author cited above draws a distinction between spirits of chiefs and spirits in streams. Here I think he is wrong. In religions of the lower culture, the ashes of an incarnate god were usually thrown into running water.<sup>9</sup> Now Zulu chiefs were at one time cremated,<sup>10</sup> and both Arbousset and Callaway state that their ashes were sometimes thrown into a river.<sup>11</sup> The Angoni who streamed forth from this same great

<sup>7</sup> LA. 154-55.

<sup>8</sup> LA. 207.

<sup>9</sup> WCWE. 276.

<sup>10</sup> SB. 47f.

<sup>11</sup> NET. 208; KNZC. 400; RSZ. 214.



group and raided the tribes round Lake Nyasa cremated their chief, Mputa, in the bed of the upper Lihuhu River.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, tribes of this group sometimes buried their dead chiefs in rivers without preliminary cremation. Five Pandomise chiefs were buried in rivers.<sup>13</sup> One of them, Majola, was buried in the Umzimvubu River;<sup>14</sup> that is why certain lands on either bank are withdrawn from cultivation and women forbidden to lift their skirts when crossing at the ford. His son, Gwanya, was tied to a log after death, sunk in a deep pool in the Tina affluent of the Umzimvubu, and covered with stones; and to propitiate him during the drought of 1891 the sixth of his successors threw new dishes full of beer into this pool, and the flesh of cattle that had been slaughtered on its banks.<sup>15</sup> And it was probably for a similar reason that the Tembus worshipped the *isiziba* in the Bashee River at the beginning of their wars.

Junod's remarks on this subject are worth quoting in their entirety.<sup>16</sup> In the Thonga territory, he tells us, "some lakes and rivers are believed to be inhabited by spirits, but not in the ordinary fetichistic way, as if there were a special spiritual being incorporated with the natural object; these spirits are *psikwembo*, spirits of deceased ancestors of the owners of the land, and they are propitiated by their descendants. Should another clan have invaded the territory where those lakes are, should crocodiles threaten fishermen, they will call someone belonging to the clan of the old possessors of the country and ask him to make an offering to appease *his* gods."<sup>17</sup> In my investigations I found one case, however, where it seemed that a special spirit, a kind of Nature spirit is invoked. It is on the sea shore, in the Northern part of Nondwane, at a place called Mahilane, where there are two great rocks on the beach. When the great waves rush against them, with a fearful roar, people go and sacrifice (*hahla*); they pray thus: 'Tsu! Oh sea! Let vessels wreck, and steamers also, and let their riches come to us and help us.' In former times a young girl was sometimes abandoned there as a prey, or an

<sup>12</sup> See p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> R. 1883. App. 403.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 403.

<sup>15</sup> ECSA. 219f.

<sup>16</sup> LSAT. ii. 302-3.

<sup>17</sup> See SB. 256f.

offering to the power of Mahilane. Now this is exactly what is done in the sacred woods for the ancestor gods and, in fact, Mboza asserts that: 'When abandoning the girl, the officiant says: You, Psikwembo, ancestor-gods, push the sea that it may wreck vessels.'

"When urged to speak with more precision, my informant answered 'Mahilane and the sea are one and the same thing. When the sea is roaring people exclaim: 'Mahilane roars'! Near the island of Shefin, where two branches of the Nkomati river meet in the estuary people say: "Makaneta roars." Here it is Makaneta and no longer Mahilane.'

"This information is extremely interesting. As regards Makaneta, we know him perfectly well; he is the ancestor of Mboza and descendant of Mazwayi. This ancestor god begins to be confused with a natural phenomenon happening in the country where he was living. The religious fear of the spirit of the deceased mingles with the awe inspired by the roaring of the sea to such an extent that both notions coincide in the imagination of the savage. We here note the exact point where *an ancestral spirit evolves into a Nature spirit*, and this instance proves as clearly as possible, that the conception of the ancestor spirit has preceded that of the Nature spirit. Here, at any rate, Ancestral-atry is anterior to both Fetichism and Naturism. These later forms of the belief can be easily accounted for by the development of Ancestral-atry: the reverse process would be much more difficult to explain."

The river Sabi in Mashonaland is said to have sprung from the head of Mtema, the chief of the Wadondo, who will not drink of its water.<sup>18</sup>

In the rivers of Bechuanaland, most of which are little more than torrent-beds, dwell monsters (*señoñói, leruarua*) that are half snake and half crocodile, and inconceivably big. Becwana fabulists entertain their young folks with tales of how one of these fearsome dragons, having gulped down a whole community, was overcome by the cunning and courage of a low-born lad, who first induced the beast to swallow him, and then ripped his way

<sup>18</sup> Cf. p. 13f.

out of its capacious maw and delivered his high and mighty neighbours. Casalis quotes<sup>19</sup> a Basuto version of this legend in which the reptile is not associated with a river; but then Bantu story-tellers constantly weave the constituent elements of their folk-tales into new combinations. Now it is to prevent this hybrid monster from dragging them under water that Becwana travellers shout and throw stones into a river before crossing it—a wise procedure when crocodiles infest the ford. Becwana legends tell of people who, in return for some kindness to an old woman of diminutive stature and devoid of charm, were taken to her unearthly home beneath a deep pool in a water-course and endowed with wisdom and wealth.

Livingstone noticed that the River Zouga was rapidly increasing in volume when he discovered it in June; and, upon asking the Natives why the water was rising so long after the rains had ceased, he was told that it was caused by the chief of a country to the north, who killed a man and threw him into the water.<sup>20</sup> Although Livingstone appears to have got no hint of the inner meaning of this fell deed, we may safely assume that it was a sacrifice to some spirit who dwelt beneath the river-bed. Stirke states<sup>21</sup> that nowadays the paramount chief of Barotseland is buried in the middle of a village that he has previously selected for the purpose, but that "in former times, many of the reigning chief's favourite indunas would voluntarily submit to having their arms tied behind their backs and being placed thus bound into a boat which had previously been bored through in several places. The boat was then towed into mid-stream and sunk." This tradition probably refers to Aluyi paramounts who dominated this region some three centuries ago.

Smith and Dale are of opinion that the fabulous monster that has its lair in a pool in the Kasenga district is likely to be the imaginary embodiment of an ancestor of the present priest of the pool.<sup>22</sup> Such incarnations are by no means rare, as these writers show.<sup>22</sup> At any rate, "the imagination of the Baila has peopled the rivers and hills and pools and forests of their country with

<sup>19</sup> Bs. 347.

<sup>20</sup> Mentioned in a letter to his brother, published by the A. B. C. F. M.

<sup>21</sup> BRT. 69.

<sup>22</sup> IPNR, i. 389; cf. Mulumbe's mysterious end, IPNR. ii. 182f.

<sup>23</sup> IPNR. ii. 129ff.

a great many monsters, which, without more proof of their existence than we have at present, we can only regard as fabulous.<sup>24</sup> Chief among these is . . . the great water monster, named Itoshi by the Nanzela people and called by the Baila simply *mupuka* or *muzoka* ('reptile', 'great snake'). All rivers and lakes in Africa are probably thought to be inhabited by similar monsters. In the Victoria Nyanza there is Lukwata (H. H. Johnston, *Uganda*, i. 79-80.). The Batonga speak of the Maloa in the Zambesi and the Barotsi of the Lengongole. . . . It is to this class of creature that Itoshi belongs. It has been described to us as as big as a very large Ihunga thorn-tree, with the body of a crocodile, the head of a man, and the fins of a fish, and upwards of fifty feet in length. It is generally invisible to all but those who have the proper medicine; should it appear to others it means death. It seizes people and takes them into its burrow under the river-bed. . . . Numerous adventures are related by people of their narrow escapes from these monsters.<sup>25</sup> What concerns us here is the fact that many people, especially chiefs, enter the water after death and become these monsters. Along the short stretch of the Kafue at Kasenga, no fewer than ten chiefs have been named as living in the river, and our informant added that there were many more whose names he did not know. Nor is it only in the Kafue that they are found; its tributaries abound with them. At Nanzela, Namongwe, who was the chief some generations ago, and Shantalo, one of his successors, are both now in the river in the form of *matoshi*." From Smith & Dale's description of the process by which magicians make 'medicine' to ensure that a person shall become an *itoshi* after death, it appears that a maggot emerges from the ear of the corpse, through a hollow reed placed for the purpose, and that if this maggot is fed till full grown and then taken to the river in solemn procession, it becomes one of these river-monsters.<sup>26</sup>

The Baila custom of propitiating the spirits of original owners of a strip of water both when the net is completed and before

<sup>24</sup> IPNR. ii. 128 ff.

<sup>25</sup> All these fabulous monsters remind us of huge dragons, serpents and water-horses that haunted Celtic lochs and rivers till early Christian saints chained them to the bottom of the waters or harnessed them to their chariots. (See RAC. 187-88.)

<sup>26</sup> Cf. SB. 8.

the first catch of fish is eaten, may perhaps have lingered from the time when some of these old worthies were buried in deep pools, or when their souls, having emerged in maggot-form, were escorted to their lairs in the rivers. Malumbe, one of the most popular of Baila divinities, may not have been buried in a river, but the story of his mysterious end is very suggestive: he simply disappeared, leaving his spears, clothes and ornaments by the side of a deep pool, and was never seen again.<sup>27</sup>

Farther north on the Great Plateau of Northern Rhodesia, the same notion is cherished by the tribesmen. "They believe," says one,<sup>28</sup> "that tremendous monsters lie hidden in the river, and lay hold of and retain the canoe, in spite of the efforts of the crew, and that someone knows the prayer that will slay them." Melland provides us with an instructive passage concerning Bakaonde beliefs:—<sup>29</sup> "*Bena-mikola*—the spirits of the place (literally 'of the rivers') and ghosts of the previous inhabitants—known or unknown (not family spirits). The Bakaonde pray to the *Bena-mikola* when starting new gardens near their existing village. When starting new gardens two small anthills are lifted and placed leaning against each other so as to make a kind of arch. Under these a little food is placed and the cultivators pray as follows: 'Ye who lived and died here long ago: ye spirits of these streams, be propitious and let these gardens that we are about to make be productive, and bring forth abundantly in due season.' Similarly at the reaping a little offering is made to the *Bena-mikola* on the spot, in addition to the offering made to the *W'a-kishi* at the village. When choosing a site for a new village great care has to be taken to find that the spirits of the locality are not adverse; for to fail in this is to invite disaster of some kind or other to the community. When a likely spot has been seen and has been favourably reported on an inspection takes place. If it seems outwardly to be a desirable place a party from the village goes to the site and a shelter is built there to accommodate them. When this has been done two elders of the proposed settlers take a little flour, and go—one upstream, the other downstream—carrying their flour. Each, separately, makes

<sup>27</sup> IPNR. ii. 183.

<sup>28</sup> WR. 141.

<sup>29</sup> WBA. 138-9.

a small conical heap of his flour, at the same time praying in these words: 'Ye who lived by this stream of old: ye who lived and died here long ago, who tilled this soil and drank of this water; list, and if ye favour our coming here to settle, then leave this heap of flour undisturbed; but if ye favour not this proposed settlement, and want us not, then—on the morrow—when we come to seek your answer let us find that ye have scattered this heap; and we will abide by your decision.' The following morning the two heaps are inspected, and if either is found scattered—even only a little—the people will seek another site elsewhere (on another stream) for their new village."

Frazer, speaking of Tumbuka beliefs, states:<sup>30</sup> "Certain large pools were worshipped, and sometimes a wandering native would see a fabulous snake with a red head enter one of the sacred pools, and this he believed was the pool-god, and at once he would call his fellow-villagers to make sacrifice there. In these waters no one would dare to bathe. When people passed by one of these sacred places they went quietly and in fear."

Mputa, the first of that name to rule a section of the Angoni which approached Lake Nyasa from the west and went round its north end, was slain in battle near the Lihuhu River, which runs into Nyasa, south of the Livingstone Mountains. "His funeral," says Archdeacon Johnson,<sup>31</sup> "seems to have been the last united act of his people and the Angoni (*sic*). . . . They blocked the water of the upper Lihuhu with stones, put the body of the chief in the skin of a newly killed bull, and burnt it in the dry bed of the river. The Angoni stood in crowds on the bank, all silent till the heat of the fire made the bones crack; then together they beat their shields with their spears." Whether this celebrated chief has since held spirit-sway over the waters of the Lihuhu, we are not told; but his obsequies help us to understand the genesis of mighty river-dwelling spirits.

The Konde are said<sup>32</sup> to believe that pre-human spirits retired to the lakes and pools when men came into the country, and there they dwell to this day, at enmity with men. In the storm that howls upon the lake, their voice is heard, demanding a victim;

<sup>30</sup> WPP. 123; see also my p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> NGW. 105.

<sup>32</sup> SRK. 197-99, 187.

and the safety of a storm-beaten canoe used to be secured by throwing them one of the paddlers. These spirits still tarry in many pools. Some three generations ago the lake receded and left a pool at Kisyombe, which is now partly silted up with sand, into which travellers are liable to sink; but if a sinking man cries out that he belongs to Kisyombe, the water-spirits who own Kisyombe's power push him up from below. Who was this Kisyombe that gave his name to the place and continues to compel water-spirits to show favour to his people? "A boy sank right through, but was returned, was directed by the spirits to give a report of all that he saw, and particularly he must insist that these spirits are *abandu* (human beings)." Perhaps they were, once; and all the more spiteful because conscious that they were no match for "the *men*" who had come into their country. "Very long ago there lived near Karonga a man called Firaguli, who after his death became a godlet, and lived on the mountain which now goes by his name. There was also a great man called Kambwe, who entered the ranks of the gods or godlets at his death, and lived in a pool a few miles from Karonga, to which in like manner he has given his name." From these vanishing memories, passages have faded away—passages that could have told us how Firaguli became connected with his hill and Kambwe with his pool. Were they the original owners of the country-side, or did they take possession by leaving their bodies there? Or did Kambwe, like some chiefs in the Ila country,<sup>33</sup> procure his posthumous fame by means of maggots or some other occult device?

Dan Crawford, visiting Kazembe in 1893, made this entry in his diary:<sup>34</sup> "The Kalumba ferry is very old, the chief having quite a good status in Lunda. On arriving here, a polite message came from him stating that as the body of Chinyanta, the second chief of the Kazembe dynasty, lies buried in the river, it was not lawful for me to approach the water until I had first paid a small tribute to propitiate the spirits haunting the spot."

The worship of a snake named Ndamathia, which lives in the Mathioya River, is prominent in the ritual of the two semi-secret societies in Kikuyu.<sup>35</sup> This snake, 'very big and long', is probably

<sup>33</sup> See my p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Dan Crawford*. By Dr. G. E. Tilsley, p. 276.

<sup>35</sup> PP. 237f.

as mythical as the spirits of other African waters; and its festival of sacrifice is associated with the rainbow and ensures abundant rains—which is what we should expect if the snake is an incarnation of some dynastic spirit.<sup>36</sup> In a Kikuyu folktale that Mrs. Routledge has very beautifully rendered,<sup>37</sup> a maiden was sacrificed to a rain-god and brought back from the underworld by her lover. We are not told anything about the particular divinity that was propitiated by having this maiden sent to his abode; but he must have passed into the underworld through a watery grave; for the artist of other days, evidently sketching from life, pictures the maiden slowly sinking into a morass, first to her knees, then to her waist, then to her breast, then to her neck, then to her eyes, till at last “she vanished from sight, and the earth closed over her, and the rain poured down, not, as you sometimes see it, in showers, but in a great deluge, and every one hastened to their homes.” One incident in this graphic story provokes inquiry. The diviner, trained to discover the mind of invisible helpers of men, manipulated his instruments and found that the divinity demanded this particular maiden; but, though the light plays on the damsel’s distress and this part of the picture is in the shadow, it looks as if the people made her their gift to the god by compensating her parents with a communal contribution of goats.

Another student of Kikuyu social usage writes<sup>38</sup> that “if a person who is a twin crosses a river, he or she must stoop down and fill the mouth with water and, facing downstream, spit it out into the river, saying, according to their sex: ‘May I not beget (or bear) twins as my father (or mother) did.’” And the writer adds—mistakenly, I think—that though this ceremony has been excusably mistaken for a propitiatory offering to a river spirit, its “root idea is that the flowing water may carry away the kind of *thahu*<sup>39</sup> which results in such an unlucky tendency as that of bearing twins.”

The same writer, speaking of Akamba tribes east of Kikuyu, says:<sup>40</sup> “In former times when some Akamba were going on a long journey a small ceremony was performed at the first stream

<sup>36</sup> Cf. my p. 88.

<sup>37</sup> PP. 287ff.

<sup>38</sup> BBM. 155.

<sup>39</sup> See my pp. 199, 257f and cf. SB. 365f.

<sup>40</sup> AK. 57.



encountered on the road. Each person as he reached the stream would dip the end of his bow in the water and touch his lips with the wetted bow, he would then jump or wade across the stream and drop a stone on the far side, only then could he drink from the stream." And in a footnote on the same page this writer wisely remarks: "This practice is evidently a survival of a ceremony connected with the propitiation of the river spirits, whether these were believed to be ancestral, like the *Aimu* is now difficult to discover."

The Natives of Taita think that the manes of their relatives dwell upon the shore of a lake in the solitudes of the mountains of Boura, and accordingly build little cabins there and make offerings, regarding the lake and all the living creatures upon it as sacred.<sup>41</sup>

When a Kavirondo crosses the Malaba River for the first time, he takes a stone from its bed and deposits it alongside Were's stone, which is just off the pathway leading to his village.<sup>42</sup>

In Uganda<sup>43</sup> "most of the rivers were thought to have originated from a human being. Thus, for example, the river Mayanja was said to have taken its rise from the spot where a princess gave birth to a child, and to have been caused by the birth-flood." The river Sezibwa had a similar origin, except that the mother was a deserted damsel instead of a princess. The only means of crossing some of the wide and deep streams of this country is to jump from tuft to tuft of papyrus; and the unlucky wight who makes a false step and is lost in the swift-flowing current beneath is said to have been caught by the spirit of the river. Hence the custom of throwing a few coffee berries into the water and asking the spirit to grant a safe crossing. The python-god, Selwanga, whose temple is in Budu, on the shore of Victoria Nyanza, and whose priesthood is confined to the Heart-clan,<sup>44</sup> is the giver of children and lord of the Majusi River and its fish. The head of the Bean-clan—a clan that was in Uganda before Kintu founded his dynasty a thousand years ago—is priest of the spirit of the river Nakiza, which flowed from the wounds of an ancient father

<sup>41</sup> RP. 104, 177.

<sup>42</sup> JRAI., 1913, pp. 19f.; cf. SB. 288.

<sup>43</sup> Bg. 318.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. SB. 81.

of their community who was speared by the Banyoro.<sup>45</sup> This river-god has no temple; but, both before and after crossing at the ford, travellers offer prayers, goats, beer, barkcloth, or fowls at great heaps of sticks and grass on either bank. The Sezibwa river, mentioned above, is haunted by a spirit named Muige, who is worshipped in a similar manner.<sup>46</sup>

At the salt-works in Bunyoro, "there are two sacred pools in which the spirits who control the production of salt are supposed to dwell. The king used to send the chief spirit an annual offering of several cows and a slave-woman. The cows were not sacrificed, but kept by the chief priest for his own use. The woman was given to one of the priest's servants on the understanding that the firstborn child should belong to the spirit. If there was no child there was no offering, but if a child was born, it was given as a sacrifice when the king sent his next annual offering. The infant was taken to one of the sacred pools, and there its throat was cut, the blood poured into the water, and the body dropped into the pool as a sacrifice."<sup>47</sup>

Mr. T. A. Barns has recorded a fact that is not irrelevant to our present study.<sup>48</sup> The Barundi, who live on the eastern escarpment of the Albertine Rift Valley, a little north of the northern bend of the Malagarasi River, bury their dead in running water, under a waterfall by preference. He and his party saw many skulls and bones in the river beds, and, on three occasions, corpses lying in the water. Commander Cameron told me that he saw corpses in rivers in the Manyema country; and he mentions in his book<sup>49</sup> that they were thus prepared for human consumption. While in Urua, on his march southward from Manyema, he became acquainted with the ceremonies observed at the burial of a chief in that country. "The first proceeding is to divert the course of a stream and in its bed dig an enormous pit, the bottom of which is then covered with living women. At one end a woman is placed on her hands and knees, and upon her back the dead chief, covered with his beads and other treasures, is seated, being supported on either side by one of his wives, while his second

<sup>45</sup> Cf. my p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> See Bg. 318, 321, 163, 241, 319.

<sup>47</sup> SCA. 160f.

<sup>48</sup> *The Wonderland of the Eastern Congo*, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> *Across Africa*, i. 357f.

wife sits at his feet. The earth is then shovelled in on them, and all the women are buried alive with the exception of the second wife. To her, custom is more merciful than to her companions, and grants her the privilege of being killed before the huge grave is filled in. This being completed, a number of male slaves—sometimes forty or fifty—are slaughtered and their blood poured over the grave; after which the river is allowed to resume its course.<sup>150</sup>

At Monsembe, a Boloki town on the right bank of the Congo about two degrees north of the equator, free men and women were buried in their own houses and slaves on the edge of the forest, river-burial being restricted to slaves who committed suicide or were offered to the river-spirits.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, "the rivers and creeks are crowded with the spirits of their ancestors."<sup>52</sup>

According to Boloki eschatology, wicked people—'wicked' in their sense of that term—are expelled from the nether world, even though they were too high in the social scale to be punished on earth.<sup>53</sup> "Then if the spirit belongs to a member of a bush-tribe (or to one whose family originally came from the bush), it will inhabit the forests or bush-lands, and unless properly appeased by gifts or conquered by charms it will turn aside animals from the hunting-traps and try to spoil all hunting operations. If the spirit belongs to a member of a riverine tribe, then, after being turned out of the nether world, it haunts the rivers and creeks and endeavors to hinder successful fishing. Hence it is no uncommon thing, when a village fails in its fishing, for the inhabitants to join their brass rods together to buy an old man or woman—old and therefore cheap—and throw him (or her) into the river to conciliate the water-spirits. Hence, also, the care taken by a fisherman to conceal his name while fishing under the general term *mwéle* ['So-and-so'], lest the disembodied spirit of an enemy should hear it and . . . keep all the fish from his traps and nets."<sup>54</sup> Discarnate spirits of riverine tribesmen who were not thought to have been expelled from the lower regions

<sup>50</sup> *Across Africa*, ii. 110.

<sup>51</sup> ACC. 318, 322.

<sup>52</sup> ACC. 261.

<sup>53</sup> ACC. 249f.

<sup>54</sup> ACC. 263f., 244.

were appeased in a similar manner: slaves were bound and thrown to them in the river.<sup>55</sup>

All over Bantu Africa, people executed for witchcraft are denied the funeral rites that commend them to their kindred in the nether world. Such spirits, having, therefore, no graves to return to, are thought to loiter near the place of execution as long as fragments of their bones remain there. But the Boloki seem to believe that all spirits frequent their old haunts rather than their burial-places.<sup>56</sup>

I wonder whether the Boloki belief that I quoted under 'Reincarnation'<sup>57</sup> throws any light on the identity of spirits supposed to haunt the waters. Here it is, in briefer form, from the same writer: "The spirits of unborn babies are supposed to be supplied to the family preserves (called *liboma*) by the disembodied spirits of the deceased members of the family. These are responsible for keeping the preserves well filled with spirits awaiting birth. The preserves may be a pool on an island, a pond in the bush or forest, or a great bombax tree."<sup>58</sup>

The rivers of this region are haunted by mythical monsters, too. "Next to the spirits in the terror they cause to the natives is a mythical monster (*engenenge*) inhabiting the islands. He is represented as having many heads and no body, and is greatly dreaded by those who have to camp on the islands during fishing and travelling; and the natives tell many stories of visits they have received from him."<sup>59</sup>

In the old Kongo Kingdom, rivers, streams and brooks are peopled with spirits called *simbi* (written *ximbi* by those who are smitten with Portuguese orthography). These can be more easily interpreted in connection with other 'Spirits of the Wild'.<sup>60</sup>

Similar beliefs prevail throughout Bantu Africa. Schweitzer speaks of evil spirits in the Ogowe River that must be propitiated before there is any hope of good fishing.<sup>61</sup> That country was inhabited by dwarf hunters long before Bantu immigrants overran

<sup>55</sup> ACC. 97; See SB. 337f.

<sup>56</sup> ACC. 268.

<sup>57</sup> SB. 170.

<sup>58</sup> ACC. 291.

<sup>59</sup> ACC. 273.

<sup>60</sup> See my pp. 101f.

<sup>61</sup> EPF. 49.

it with their iron weapons, and these little people are not extinct. Du Chaillu calls them *Obongo*. He came upon one of their villages in 1865; and his account of their burial customs may help us to understand how spirits came to take up their abode in trees and rivers.<sup>62</sup> He writes: "The modes of burial of these savages, as related to me by my Ashango companions, are curious. The most common habit is to place the corpse in the interior of a hollow tree in the forest, filling up the hole with branches and leaves mixed with earth; but sometimes they make a hole in the bed of a running stream, diverting the current for the purpose, and then, after the grave is covered in, turning back the rivulet to its former course." The Yorubas, a Sudanese tribe, live some seven or eight degrees farther north and immediately west of the lower Niger. In one of their civil wars, "a provincial king of great importance, a real crowned head", fell into the hands of the victors. Since no pure Yoruba would venture to do violence to a king, even if the king's life was forfeit, a slave was hired to do the deed and afterwards executed as a regicide by his employers. Then, having dammed up a river in its course, they buried the king deep in its bed, and allowed the river to flow on again in its old channel. "*Burying the king in the bed of the river*", adds Johnson, who was himself a Yoruba—"Burying the king in the bed of the river was regarded as an expiation made for his murder."<sup>63</sup> Ellis states<sup>64</sup> that rivers and lakes have spirits which, when displeased, drown people who are crossing, but which are appeased with the offering of a white plate, a white chicken, or a white cloth. He narrates also a legend that King Salee sacrificed his son, Vahnee Bamblu, to the alligators: an old man dreamt that the alligators would not be appeased till the king had sacrificed the son that he loved most, and the son, loyal to his father's will, was first supplied for three weeks with everything that he desired and then, dressed in his finest clothes and ornaments, was placed in a canoe and sunk in mid-river. Spirits of rivers and water-holes are greatly respected in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast:<sup>65</sup> they can slay men,

<sup>62</sup> *A Journey to Ashango-Land*. By Paul B. Du Chaillu. p. 321.

<sup>63</sup> *History of the Yorubas*. By the Rev. Samuel Johnson. p. 243.

<sup>64</sup> *Negro Culture in West Africa*, pp. 89, 90, 92.

<sup>65</sup> NTG. 34-35.

it is true, but can also bring good fortune. Their guidance is sometimes sought by men who are in search of wives; and at critical periods in the married life of a wife who has been found by their aid (such as pregnancy and childbirth), the husband makes some acknowledgment to the unseen matrimonial agent. These spirits are propitiated with sacrifices of fowls and goats, and travellers secure their aid, or at least their benevolent neutrality, by throwing cowries, grain, or meal into any large river that they propose to cross and informing them that they are about to enter the water. These spirits dwell beneath the river-bed, so Cardinall says, and their dwelling-places are like those of men;<sup>66</sup> people who have been almost drowned declare that they have seen the underworld in which these spirits live.<sup>68</sup>

Strabo, the Greek geographer (Born about B. C. 54),<sup>67</sup> who lived at Alexandria for a while, went up the Nile as far as Syene (near the first cataract) with Gallus, then prefect of Egypt, and visited the Ethiopians whose chief city was Meroe. Whether these Ethiopians should be classed with Bantu in speech and custom, or, as other evidence suggests, with the inhabitants of the Great Black Belt that stretches from the Nile to the Atlantic, there is nothing in Strabo's narrative to indicate; but he asserts—and these are points of interest in our present study—that they revered their kings as gods and regarded an oath on the dead as very sacred, and that some of them threw their dead into the river.<sup>69</sup>

Now a careful consideration of all this evidence leads, I think, to the following conclusions. There is a widespread African belief that rivers and lakes are haunted by powerful demons, whose lairs, in the underworld beneath the waters, bear a striking resemblance to the dwellings of men. These spirits disport themselves in the swift-flowing currents and eddies of deep pools, where their power is felt and their form generally unseen. People who have had hairbreadth escapes from their clutches, and magicians whose charmed eyes are sensitive to what ordinary mortals cannot perceive, say, however, that they look like small,

<sup>66</sup> Cf. SB. 172.

<sup>67</sup> Died about A. D. 21.

<sup>68</sup> See Hollis: *The Nandi*, p. 41.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in ECSA. 159-161.

ugly and malevolent old men, or prodigious serpents or crocodiles, or plesiosaurian monsters, some say with human heads. Being lords of the waters, their domains cannot be invaded with impunity; but they are not implacable; they may be appeased with soft words and gifts; their aid may be solicited before war is undertaken; and, as gods of fertility, intimately associated with rain and the rainbow, they may render immeasurable help to their worshippers in time of drought, or of conjugal perplexity. Some of them can be approached only through hereditary priests, who are often of different stock from that of the tribe that is now paramount in the district; but others, with no surviving priesthood, may be approached direct by any suppliant. In these characteristics, water-demons take after ancestor-spirits, particularly spirits of a dynasty.

The genesis of some of these strange beings is sunk in oblivion, but that of others is recent and notorious. Right up to our own time, it has been customary for certain tribes to bury their chiefs in deep pools or beneath swift-flowing streams,<sup>70</sup> and to cast into these waters such offerings and sacrifices as other tribes place occasionally upon a chief's grave. Just as discarnate spirits of a dynasty haunt the sacred groves that have grown over their earthly remains, so the spirits of these chiefs haunt the waters that flow over their bones; the latter, like the former, clothing themselves in the forms of creatures that prowl about the entrances to their eternal habitations; and, whether buried in streams, groves, or caves, a few famous chiefs not only retain but magnify their unearthly power for ages after their deeds, qualities, and even names have vanished from the traditions of men.

Although the evidence is too slender to bear the weight of a dogmatic assertion that all Bantu water-spirits are of human

<sup>70</sup> The Negrillos of Equatorial Africa (a more aboriginal race than the Bantu) bury their dead standing up in a ditch in the bed of a stream. (RP. 247.) The Bushmen of South Africa (perhaps the most aboriginal of the races that now dwell in that continent) believed that men who ruined themselves by excessive indulgence in the licentious dance that they call *Mo'koma* ('the dance of blood') "were carried off by *Kaang* to some mysterious retreat beneath the water, where they were transformed into beasts, and had constant chastisement administered to them as a punishment for their excesses." Stow found a rock-shelter at one of the sources of the Elands River, in the Malutis, "where the whole of this myth was most wonderfully and clearly depicted." (NRSA. 119-121.)

origin, it seems, nevertheless, to call for that verdict. If we assume that all these spirits took their rise in the remains of old notabilities who were buried in or beneath the water, we can account for the belief that some rivers flowed from the heads or the wounds of ancient chiefs who made their dynasties famous, that these spirits are the real owners of the land and all its wild life, that they are entitled to first fruits of each new fishing season, that some people, especially chiefs who are aided by the magician's art, still enter the water after death and assume these grotesque forms, and that water-worn boulders from a river-bed are appropriate altar-stones in many ancestral shrines; and, moreover, we can understand how remnants of their stock, embedded in communities that have subjugated their tribe or its conquerors, have become their hereditary priests after all political power has been lost to their line, and how it has come about that spirits whose sway has outlasted their posterity are propitiated direct by anybody who is obliged to invade their preserves. If we assume, on the other hand, that these spirits in the waters are Nature-spirits, we weave a tangled web around Bantu beliefs concerning them.

Another knotty point is the relation of the fabulous to the real denizens of the waters. Scores of Bantu tribes, like those of the Transkei and Bechuanaland, have an aversion to fish; Zulus believe that he who slays an otter will become insane—that is, 'possessed'<sup>71</sup>—unless he is forthwith ceremonially purged of his offence; ever so many tribes from Basutoland to the Equator believe that he who kills a crocodile will either die or lose a dear friend before the next new moon; and West Congo tribes hold the crocodile in special awe, regarding it as 'in some way the particular associate of the worst kind of spirit known to the Congo mind'<sup>72</sup>—which probably means<sup>73</sup> the kinless and famished spirits of earlier inhabitants who were looked upon as capricious and pernicious because their alien psychology was shrouded in mystery. In all likelihood, legends that have gathered around these real denizens of the waters are connected with past or present totems of the tribes concerned or of the trunk from

<sup>71</sup> See SB. 104-112.

<sup>72</sup> WBT. 265.

<sup>73</sup> See p. 110f.



which they are offshoots. If totemism is older than ancestor-worship, it is easier to believe that the chief was buried in the haunts of his totem, than that a species of animal became the totem because it haunted the burial-place of the chiefs.

Some other Bantu rites and notions may find their explanation in these spirits that frequent the waters. For example, although there is apparently, no thought of worship in the minds of present-day Basuto who peg down a pelt on a little island in a pool as a rain-rite, this rite is not unlikely to have originated in the sacrifice of an animal to a chief who was buried in the lakelet and placing its skin, as nearly as possible, upon his grave; for ceremonies have a much longer life than the theories that they were originally intended to symbolize.

#### SACRED STONES AND CAIRNS

Stones placed in forks of trees or by the side of a path as it enters a gorge or approaches a village, often excite the attention of travellers in Africa. Dr. Wilder mentions,<sup>75</sup> a Mashona belief that the placing of such stones will cause the sun to delay its setting, so that the traveller may reach his destination.<sup>76</sup> Bullock had also heard of this delusion.<sup>77</sup> Some of my Becwana neighbours said the same, but most of them told me that herdboys placed these stones there "for luck", without a thought of worship. It is true, of course, that outworn rites of a bygone age become toys to the verdant-minded; but in Basutoland these stones are still definitely associated with prayers to ancestor-spirits. Ellenberger says:<sup>78</sup> "Who has not seen in former years, and even today, piles of pebbles at the side of the path leading to the abode of an important chief? These pebbles were placed there by pious persons, who, having reverently expectorated upon them, would thus invoke the Shade of the departed: 'O gods, arrange it so that I may get some food' (from the chief)."

There are sacred rocks in various parts of Bechuanaland. *Setlagole* ('A-thing-which-came-long-ago'), the name of a Baro-

<sup>75</sup> 'Hartford Seminary Record', Oct. 1907.

<sup>76</sup> The Alunda believe that the top of a small ant-heap stuck into the fork of a tree secures this result. (WBA. 235.) Cf. SRK. 199.

<sup>77</sup> MLC. 88.

<sup>78</sup> HB. Introd. p. xx.

long settlement south of Mafeking, is said to refer to a sacred rock, named *Seilhwathwa* ('A-thing-of-price'), which stands a little way out of the present village, on the Kuruman road. There are two rocks, I am told, an obelisk and a great nodule that lies by its side, at which the Barolong used to offer beads, corn, and prayers for locusts,<sup>79</sup> rain, and protection from epidemics. To add weight to their prayers for rain, they brought herds of thirsty cattle to these rocks, believing that the lowing of the distressed beasts would move the gods to pity. Now in time of drought all Becwana tribes had a practice of turning the cows out unmilked in the morning, so that, by lowing all day long, the cattle which had won the hearts of the old chiefs might again stir their feelings in the underworld and stimulate them to intercede with the Great Giver of Rain. The rain-rite at *Setlhwathwa* suggests, therefore, that the rock is somehow linked with the spirits of a dynasty, though all tradition to that effect has disappeared.

I have described this rock from Native information, but I have seen similar natural obelisks scattered over the country. A mile or two on the Molepolole side of Gamoshopa, there is an obelisk called *Mokwanatlhógó* ('He-who-bends-the-head'); but, though the name suggests obeisance, I could discover no tradition that worship was ever associated with it, and conclude that it got its name from the fact that it leans over on one side.

I heard of a rock called *Subyana*, on a hill named *Thobani*, a dozen miles from Makome on the Motloutse River. My Bamangwato friends told me that it was 'a flat rock which God had shaped very beautifully, very smooth and level', to which Masarwa, and occasionally Becwana, resort with offerings and prayers; but whether there were legends concerning the rock or the worship that centered round it, they did not know.

In the midst of an ancient ruin of the earlier and better type of workmanship, at *Shakashugwe's* village, not far from the sources of the Shashi River, I came upon a natural obelisk of no great height with two round rocks at its base, which struck me as

<sup>79</sup> Becwana prayed for locusts much more frequently than they prayed to be delivered from them: locusts came when the granaries of the improvident were empty, and the succulent morsels were a godsend to the famished people. Such prayers were sure of an answer, as far as I can learn.

being distinctly phallic, though I could discern no sign of artificial shaping. The local Makalanga had no tradition that this group of rocks had ever been an object of worship, or that it was more sacred than the rest of the prehistoric ruins that prudent people never visit in the witching hour of night.

Three or four miles east of Mhasha, on the old hunters' road from Tati to Pandamatenka, a huge obelisk stands out boldly on the skyline of a hill called Ndombashaba, and is held in awe by the local Makalanga. According to their tradition, it was once a centre of worship; but that was so long ago that the details of the tradition have faded away. As they sat round my camp fire, the old men of the district argued for an hour about the correct Secwana equivalent for its Sekalanga name, Monyaolofhwe; but all agreed that it must be either 'Master-of-the-hearth' or 'Master-of-death', the argument turning, apparently, on a fine shade of difference in the pronunciation of the Sekalanga word. Trying to recall tales that they had heard in their childhood, some said that the rock was built by a great chief after his son had died, and others, that the son of a great chief had tried to take it away as a stool for his father; but they were at one in asserting that the legends referred to a time long anterior to the arrival of their forefathers in the country.

Whether the sanctity that clings to some rocks between the Zambesi and the Vaal can ever tell its own tale till the mystery of the ancient ruins of Mashonaland has been unveiled, is open to question. A scrutiny of the finds that have been unearthed leaves little room for doubt that phallic emblems had special significance to the unknown strangers who, in their passion for gold, built the earlier and better walls of Zimbabwe and many other fortresses and temples; but it must also be recognized that phallic emblems figure in Bantu ancestor-worship, especially between the Zambesi and the southern tropic—a hypothesis without which it is hard to understand the black pebbles that stand for the progenitors of the clan in Makalanga shrines, and the axe-helve erected beside them in some shrines and as the sole emblem in others.<sup>80</sup> Some hint of the homage paid to the rocks in this district may be embedded in the names they bear. But one

<sup>80</sup> See SB. 273-78, 286.

wonders whether the Bantu names are original appellations, or Bantu renderings of names that the first immigrants of this stock learnt from men of another race, or, more likely still, Bantu homonyms for these foreign words.<sup>81</sup>

Frazer, speaking of the Tumbuka, says: "Many of the mighty natural objects were worshipped, such as conspicuous hills, wild waterfalls, great trees, deep pools. They were not revered as the dwelling-place of some deity or spirits, but as themselves animate or divine. Thus two hills in the Rukuru gorge are often worshipped. Passengers in the gorge declare that they sometimes hear the cocks belonging to the hills crow, and when the sound of the tumbling water echoes between the mountain-sides they say the hills are at war with one another."<sup>82</sup> That the Bantu credit all natural objects with the possession of souls, can hardly be denied; nor can it be doubted that their magicians profess to control the spirits of things. Dr. Frazer may, therefore, be correct in his interpretation of the reverential fear which he has noticed; but among the many cognate facts that I have collected there are some which do not fall easily into their places till one is seized of the idea that whatever *worship* (in the sense of adoration, humility, propitiation, communion—prayer as opposed to spell) is rendered to natural objects is due to a belief that they are portals by which the spirits of notabilities have entered the underworld; and the fact that the spirits of the hills in the Rukuru gorge keep domestic fowls, suggests at once that they are human in their habits and origin,<sup>83</sup> and were once, if not now, gladdened by the fowls that their kindred sacrificed to them.

Heaps of loose stones which are regarded with awe are

<sup>81</sup> Such place names in Northern Bechuanaland as Mhalapye, Taupye, Phalapye, Tloopye, consists of a Bantu stem (Mhala-, Tau-, Phala-, Tloo-) with a non-Bantu termination (-pye), the latter suggestive of a feminine affix found in some other African tongues. Now, if the stems of these words are translations of terms that the first Bantu immigrants found (say) Bushmen applying to these localities, how came it that people who thought in phrases rather than words did not translate the affix also? Is it not possible that a name of this kind stands for a foreign word of which the major portion sounded like a word of other meaning that was in common use among the immigrants? This process still goes on. British Railway surveyors could neither hear nor understand the outlandish word Tloopye (the 'tl' pronounced with an inspiration, and the 'py' representing a consonant that is not used in English); so they put it on the map as 'Topsi'—which was reminiscent of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, though not of its author's spelling.

<sup>82</sup> WPP. 122-3.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. pp. 17, 43, 59, 79, 154, and SB. 59, 73, 343.

scattered all over Bantu Africa, generally in lonely places, and often where two paths meet. I have seen them in Bechuanaland and as far north as five degrees south of the Equator, and they are described by writers who knew other parts of the country.<sup>64</sup> Travellers who pass these heaps of rubbish greet 'the spirit' by throwing upon the pile a few grains of corn, a stone, or a bit of stick; or they who come upon them unawares, with nothing to bestow, restore some fragment that has rolled off the cairn, or, if heavily laden, kick back with their toes a little of the dust from the adjacent path.

A writer from the Kafir-Zulu territories speaks thus of these strange shrines:<sup>65</sup> "At long intervals, beside the great footpaths of the country, there are large cairns of small stones. All who pass them cast a stone on the cairn. They then give a royal salute and add, 'Ahl sivitane' (i.e., hail cairn), 'grant us strength and prosperity.' On being questioned as to the origin and meaning of these *sivitane*, they profess utter ignorance, and say the prayer is to the great spirit."

Nassau presented Miss Kingsley with an unconvincing classification of spirits according to West Coast ideas,<sup>66</sup> in which the third class consists of "Beings something like dryads, who resent intrusion into their territory, on to their rock, past their promontory, or tree. When passing the residence of one of these beings, the traveller must go by silently, or else with some cabalistic invocation, with bowed or bared head, and deposit some symbol of an offering or tribute even if it be only a pebble. You occasionally come across great trees that have fallen across the path that have little heaps of pebbles, small shells, etc., upon them deposited by previous passers-by. This class is called Ombwiri." Le Roy refers to cairns that he saw both in East and West Africa. "These manes are supposed to dwell near their tombs, in the cemeteries, or at the very spot where the man fell," he writes.<sup>67</sup> "Hence along the caravan routes we often see heaps of stones, twigs, or even leaves that are piled up in the form of a

<sup>64</sup> Livingstone noted them on the borders of the Lunda country when ascending the Zambesi. MTR. 304.

<sup>65</sup> LA. 208.

<sup>66</sup> TWA. 300, also footnote FWA. 97.

<sup>67</sup> RP. 103-104.

mound (*tumulus*) to which each passer-by adds something, a pebble, a little twig, or a handful of grass." "In the regions of Gabon, Congo, and Angola," he writes on another page,<sup>88</sup> "as well as in the center, south, north, and on the eastern coast, on the highways, the river banks, or the lake shores, there are places recognized as being consecrated by a supernatural influence. Here a celebrated man died or met with some unusual incident. There some inexplicable event happened which was attributed to the action of a spirit; in another place it would seem that they wished, under that special point of the sky, to render a sort of homage to the sovereign Being who from on high presides over man's existence and who can at any moment take it from him. In these chosen places, every passer-by, stray traveler, caravan porter, or canoe paddler, throws a stone, a twig, a leaf; at length the piles become rather high. Mounds are met with along all the highways of the interior. In Gabon their homage is directed in this way toward *Ombwiri*, the genius of the earth,<sup>89</sup> and is intended to protect them against the bad tricks he might play them during the journey. On the caravan routes, the Wanyamwezi (eastern Africa) have recourse to the same practice in honour of the *Mzimu* (spirit of the dead)." He mentions, also, that while the Masai (who are not Bantu) deposit the corpses of ordinary people for hyenas to devour, they bury their notabilities under trees and put stones upon the graves, 'to which each passer-by adds a pebble'.<sup>90</sup>

Le Roy's surmise that a sort of homage is rendered to the Supreme Being at any of these spots, must be regarded as gratuitous, I fear; and so must Nassau's notion that the *ombwiri* (pl. *awiri*) of Gabon is something like a dryad; but Le Roy's rendering of this term as 'the genius of the earth' is arrestive. That he does not intend this interpretation to be exhaustive is evident from another page,<sup>92</sup> where he quotes with approval Nassau's statement that 'souls of distinguished chiefs and other great men turn to *awiri*.' Kidd, expatiating on the occurrence of

<sup>88</sup> RP. 201.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. my p. 106.

<sup>90</sup> RP. 260.

<sup>92</sup> RP. 109.

these cairns in South Africa,<sup>93</sup> thinks the throwing of a stone upon the pile may be intended to drive away evil spirits or to appease the spirits of ancestors; though, why the spirits that haunt these spots should be always malignant or angry, or why they should be appeased or driven away by the throwing of a stone or something else, he does not attempt to explain. He says the custom is supposed to be of Bushman or Hottentot origin, and that the Hottentots used to declare that these heaps cover the many graves of their semi-mythical hero, Heitsi-eibib, who died and rose again many times. Now Heitsi-eibib, as the Namaqua Hottentots call him, or Garubeb, as he is called by their Koranna kinsmen, is a mythical chief of great wisdom and power, who dwelt in a land to the east, exterminated all his foes, and had abundance of cattle and sheep. The Namaquas say that he could foresee future events and assume any form that suited his purpose; that he died and came back again time after time, sometimes as a man and sometimes as an animal; and that he still wanders at night in lonely parts of his old domain, and gives skill and protection to any hunter or traveller who lays a stone, a flower, a twig, a bit of rag, or a little honey on any of the cairns that cover his graves.<sup>94</sup> Since Hottentots are supposed to have sprung from the intermarriage of Hamites with other stocks in Kenya and Somaliland,<sup>95</sup> some light may be thrown on these cairns and their legends by the Masai custom of covering the grave of a medicine-man or rich person with stones; for "whenever anybody passes this spot he throws a stone on to the heap, and this is done for all time."<sup>96</sup>

But cairns are not confined to the part of Africa that Hottentots once called their own; they are found in all parts of the country. "It was formerly the custom", writes Hopley of the Akamba,<sup>97</sup> "to pick up sticks or stones at the side of the road at the place where something bad or unlucky had been seen, for instance, if a man saw some human excrement near the side of the road he would throw a stick or a stone upon it and the next

<sup>93</sup> EK. 263-67.

<sup>94</sup> See Quatrefages: *The Pygmies*, 212-7.

<sup>95</sup> Haddon: *The Races of Man*, pp. 41, 51.

<sup>96</sup> Hollis: *The Masai*, pp. 305f.

<sup>97</sup> AK. 101.

passer-by would do likewise, and so on, till quite a heap accumulated. The same custom prevailed among the Masai, and great cairns may be seen at places on the road between Kinobop plateau and Naivasha." Again we note the occurrence of the cairns, but wait for a more satisfactory explanation of their origin and of the pious rites that are associated with them.

Crawford, with characteristic bent for fantastic moralizing and theologizing, writes from Luanza:<sup>98</sup> "We came on an African cairn (*mfinga*,) each traveller throwing his stone on the heap as he moves on. The curious (shall I say contemptible?) cause of this ever-increasing heap is a fall, the fall of some previous traveller who came a cropper on the slippery path. Hence this cairn of contempt, hence all these 'stones of stumbling' thrown as a taunt on the great and growing heap. Why should a two-legged man fall? Why become a baby again grovelling on the ground? All this the jeering cairn says to the passer-by, and the hint has in it the double dig of a double fall, material and moral," etc., etc. I reluctantly quote this supercilious sneer, but it indicates that in the Luanza district these cairns are somehow associated with untoward happenings.

In Mashonaland, Bullock tells us,<sup>99</sup> these heaps of stones are called *ambakwe*, and it is thought unlucky to pass such a heap without adding a stone to it, or spitting upon it if no stone can be found. When he sought to discover their significance, some said they commemorated the clandestine union of lovers, and others that when a Mashona receives permission to form a kraal he starts an *ambakwe*; but he wisely adds that both these explanations are probably guesses made to explain a custom for which the reason has been forgotten.

Methuen noticed these cairns when wandering through Southern Bechuanaland in 1844.<sup>100</sup> Natives paid them much respect, he says, "addressing them occasionally with 'Rumala khoseel' or, hail king! in passing; at the same time contributing a stick or a stone to the heap, and requesting success in whatever they may be engaged in." The Natives told him that they thought the cairns marked the burial-places of chiefs. At my request, a very

<sup>98</sup> *The South African Outlook*, Lovedale, Feb. 1922.

<sup>99</sup> MLC. 88.

<sup>100</sup> LW. 204.



intelligent Mongwaketsi gave me a note which he had written in the vernacular. "A cairn," said he, "is a heap of stones that is heaped up by people who are passing by. It is not a mere heap of stones without significance; it is worship among the Becwana. It began sometimes as the grave of a person who was killed for a fault, or killed in war, and who was not buried, but left with a few stones thrown on him, and everyone in passing by that way throws a stone on the heap before passing, and salutes it, saying, 'Greetings! Cairn.' If a person passes this cairn without throwing a stone or leaves on it, his heart will be troubled within him and he will be full of fear, thinking that he will be punished by the spirits for passing a spirit without saluting and honouring it: So it comes to be a heap in that way."

All my questions concerning the origin and meaning of a cairn called Mopepe wa. Señoñope, at the foot of the Cwapong Hills, not far from Khama's old town of Phalapye, were met with the statement that it covered the remains of a Cwapong chieftain; but some said that he had committed suicide there, and others that he had fallen in fight. The Becwana call such a cairn *sefhikancwe*—the same word that they use for the tombstone, coping, slab, or other memorial placed on a European grave. Le Roy has a theory of his own about the connotation of such words as *mopepe*. He asserts<sup>101</sup> that the Bantu use such terms as 'to live' or 'to breathe' to designate the human soul, and some image from the exterior world to designate a non-human spirit. "They will select, for instance," he continues, "this breeze that springs up in silence, passes in the trees whose leaves it moves, touches our faces, and although invisible, has a perceptible, mysterious, and disturbing effect on the things of visible nature. The same word *Pepo*, *Peho*, *Om-pepo*, *Om-bepo*, literally meaning *wind*, figuratively signifies *spirit*." I can find no evidence in support of this contention. My experience is that the Bantu are not careful, in ordinary conversation, to discriminate between their various words for 'spirit', but that a few precisians among them use such words as *pepo*, *peho*, etc., to denote a wraith that is felt but not seen.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>101</sup> RP. 109f.

<sup>102</sup> Students are familiar with Eliphaz's dramatic description of the horror of his encounter with such an uncanny visitor: "Then a breath passed over my face; The

When a man of the Herero tribe dies far from home, his family make a cairn of stones at his village, and perform the same ceremonies at the cairn as they would have performed at his grave.<sup>103</sup> They call such a cairn *otyisenginina*, which is said to mean 'something which represents an ancestral spirit.' But scattered through their country are cairns similar to those that the Kafir-Zulu tribes call *isivivane*, which the Herero call *ombindi* (pi. *ozombindi*). It is said that, "at these *Ozombindi*, the same ceremonies are also sometimes performed as at the graves, and at the said *ovisenginina* (pi. of *otyisenginina*)."<sup>104</sup>

"Old Magato died in Botokoa, but his remains had to be buried in Dzanane, in his own country. Wherever his remains stayed for a rest everybody engaged in the transport placed a stone at the resting-place. This custom is practised on various occasions, amongst others by wedding parties, and many of these heaps of stones are to be found throughout the country. *Tseavela* (resting-place) is the name given to such a heap. Whenever a travelling Bavenda comes across such a stone-heap he says, 'It is the resting-place of someone.' He increases the heap by one more stone and prays for *bon voyage*."<sup>105</sup> If the heap is thought to cover the last resting-place, or even the temporary resting-place, of a corpse, the prayer can be accounted for; but why pray where a wedding-party happened to cool their heels?

"One of the paths that lead to the Loangwa plain today passes by an ancient heap of stones which stands alone in a great reach of uninhabited and poor stone land. Here is buried one of these Tumbuka chieftlets whose villages lay in the valley below. He became possessed of an evil spirit, went forth dancing in the night-time alone and naked, and drew on himself the suspicion of being a sorcerer. His people made him go through the poison ordeal, and as he was unable to vomit the poison, he was pronounced guilty of the charge, was stoned to death on the hill-top, and his body burned, and over him a heap of stones was thrown, and to this day all who pass that way place a stone on the mound

hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern the appearance thereof" (Job iv. 15).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. SB. 29-31.

<sup>104</sup> *Journal of the South African Folk-lore Society*, May, 1879.

<sup>105</sup> R. BAAS, 105. iii. 214.

lest their feet swell. And so the pile has grown through the past two generations until it is now of great size, though the travellers who pass are very few."<sup>106</sup> The same writer tells us<sup>107</sup> that if a man was suspected of being a witch he was doomed to the poison ordeal, and if he died his body was burned outside the village and a heap of stones thrown over the remains.

Placing stones on a grave is an old and widespread Bantu custom, intended originally, perhaps, to hinder hyenas and other foul-feeding brutes from unearthing the corpse. At the final burial-rite in a Tembu kraal, after the sacrifice which enables the soul to pass from the limbo of the graveyard to the infernal abode of departed spirits, every inhabitant of the kraal places a stone on the grave and utters the pious wish: 'Look on us from the place where you have gone!' Is this not the link between the grave and the cairn? Some cairns probably memorialize old masters of the veld, here and there an aboriginal who attained distinction among his contemporaries;<sup>108</sup> none have to do with dryads or Nature-spirits of any other variety; but most of them, I think, mark spots where people came to an untimely end, some by their own hand, others by accident, a few perhaps in combat, and many more by the decree of the community. The stones and sticks that are piled upon the dust of the unhappy dead are akin to the mollifying gifts that are laid upon more respectable graves; and all who pass by, even the veriest strangers, add something to the heap to make up for the burial that was withheld, uttering, at the same time, some polite remark, lest they should heedlessly rouse a spirit with such fatal practices.

We have still to enquire, however, why so many of these cairns are found at the junction of two paths. "There are no particular customs connected with suicide" in the Akamba country, so Hobley writes,<sup>109</sup> "although suicide is certainly not unknown among them. When people hang or stab or drown themselves they are supposed to be possessed by a malevolent spirit." The Baila regard suicide, which is by no means uncommon among them, as an atrocity; and, although they are said to have

<sup>106</sup> WPP. 115.

<sup>107</sup> WPP. 165.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. SB. 256ff.

<sup>109</sup> BBM. 29.

no greater fear of the ghosts of suicides than of other ghosts, they are credited with the belief that such a ghost is likely to exhibit the same pernicious propensity in its next reincarnation.<sup>110</sup> In Uganda, a suicide's ghost was dreaded; the tree on which he hanged himself was cut down and used as fuel for burning his body at the crossroads, the material of his demolished dwelling being added to the pyre; and women who passed the place where such a body had been burned, threw grass or sticks on the heap, to prevent the ghost from entering into them and being reborn. In that country, also, a child born feet first was always killed and buried at the cross-roads, and passers-by threw bits of stick and grass upon its grave.<sup>111</sup> In some tribes twins were exposed or buried at cross-roads.<sup>112</sup> Macdonald writes<sup>113</sup> that in his time it was customary around Blantyre to burn the remains of a dead man's food, the ashes of his fire, and the thatch of his roof at a cross-road; and quotes Livingstone as saying that Balonda consider a cross-road sacred.<sup>117</sup> The Bakongo bury very bad people at cross-roads.<sup>117a</sup> "On the eastern coast," writes Le Roy,<sup>114</sup> "men or women accused of sorcery, when they have been judged and condemned, are generally burned on a fire of ebony outside the village at the cross-roads. Passing along the caravan routes, you will often come upon little heaps of ashes, with debris of bones and some blackened brands. Nearby, on a dead tree or one that has been stripped you will see some wretched rags hanging in the wind: black justice has passed that way."

In the Bakaonde ritual for removing sickness from a village, all fires are extinguished and the village swept, and all ashes, charred sticks and rubbish are taken outside to a place where paths branch; there the liver and bowels of a goat which has been sacrificed for the occasion is added to the heap and the whole pile burnt together.<sup>115</sup> This looks like the propitiation at the cross-roads of a malignant spirit who is deemed to have caused the epidemic in the village. In the country of the Ila-speaking

<sup>110</sup> IPNR. i. 421-3; ii. 116.

<sup>111</sup> Bg. 21, 127.

<sup>112</sup> See pp. 157, 162.

<sup>113</sup> A. i. 169, 227.

<sup>114</sup> RP. 227.

<sup>115</sup> See SRK. 212 for rain-rites at the cross-roads.

<sup>117a</sup> APB. 274.

<sup>116</sup> WBA. 229.

people, a man dreamt that two ghosts were fighting about him, and the diviner told him to make an offering to the deliverer that he might go on delivering and an offering to the malignant ghost at the cross-roads.<sup>116</sup> Nothing is said about a cairn, but it is significant that the offering (usually made at a grave or a shrine which stands in its stead) to the *malignant* spirit had to be made *at the cross-roads*. Cross-roads outside villages are often haunted by demons because of the use to which the place is put, but whether 'sacred' is just the word to use in this connection, is another matter.

In the vicinity of Newala,<sup>116</sup> Weule often saw, in the middle of little cleared spaces at the junction of two roads, a circle (about a foot in diameter) roughly drawn in snow-white meal, enclosing little heaps of flour 'arranged according to some recognized system, with more or less regularity, in rows of three or four.' Having ascertained that these offerings were connected with discarnate human spirits, the best explanation that occurred to him (as he phrases it) was that these spirits wander restlessly about the country, naturally preferring the main roads, as they did while in the flesh, and that cross-roads are where they are most commonly to be found.<sup>119</sup> This explanation is certainly possible, but a little Native testimony on the subject would be more convincing.

Now it is interesting to note that the notions and practices that we have been considering, queer as they seem to us, are not confined to the Bantu, or even to Africa. In the pre-dynastic period in Egypt, graves were covered with a small heap of sand and stones. "Among the Arabs a heap of stones, or a standing stone was placed upon the grave, and was believed to be occupied by the dead just as really as similar stones in sanctuaries were occupied by the gods."<sup>120</sup> After mentioning that in Britain "until 1823 the body of the self-murderer was directed to be buried in a cross road, with a stake driven through his body," the compiler of a curious little volume of *Church Folk Lore* proceeds to quote a letter "from the Rev. Mr. Watkins to Dr. Lyttleton, formerly

<sup>116</sup> IPNR, ii. 135.

<sup>117</sup> On the left bank of the Rovuma River, about 100 miles from its mouth.

<sup>118</sup> NLEA. 323-26.

<sup>119</sup> SCD. 203.

Bishop of Carlisle."<sup>121</sup> "The letter is dated from Gethly, May 14, 1763, and the passage runs thus:—'We have here a custom to this day for every passenger to throw a stone over the grave of such wretches as are buried at the cross road, with the following curse, 'Yn garn y bo ti,' i.e., "May such villains be buried under a heap of stones." These heaps are very common and are looked upon as the highest marks of infamy. The custom is very ancient. We read in 2 Samuel xviii. 17, "And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him." ' "Dr. Patrick's comment on this verse," continues the compiler, "quotes Adricomius' description of the Holy Land, where he says that travellers as they went by the heap of stones were wont to throw a stone to add to the heap, in detestation of their rebellion. One of the most horrid curses among the Welsh to this day is 'Yn garn y bo ti' ". MacCulloch, speaking of certain pagan practices that have survived until now, is still more to the point:<sup>122</sup> "In Celtic districts a cairn or a cross is placed over the spot where a violent or accidental death has occurred, the purpose being to appease the ghost, and a stone is often added to the cairn by all passers-by."

Souls that had been snatched from their bodies before 'their day' were held in horror by ancient Greeks and Romans also; and timid or compassionate people, deeming the denial of ritualistic burial to suicides and executed criminals to be a source of infinite torment to the dead, used to throw earth upon an abandoned corpse. A soul violently or unjustly torn from its body fared no better; it became a swift and vengeful spirit, restlessly circling about the corpse that it could not abandon, or fluttering here and there near the place of burial or on the spot where the body that it had occupied had been assailed.<sup>123</sup>

This notion is found in many parts of the world. One of our students, who has been a missionary in Burma for years, tells me that when Burmese travellers happen upon a little pile of stones that marks the grave of a criminal or a suicide at the cross roads, they throw a stone on the pile so that the evil spirit, which is still prowling about the grave, may not molest them.

<sup>121</sup> *Op. cit.* 196.

<sup>122</sup> RAC. 167.

<sup>123</sup> See ALRP 64, 130, 134, 143, 145.

## CAVES AND HILLS

The cave is the prototype of the most sacred chamber in many ancient Mediterranean temples, and has been regarded by hundreds of nations as an avenue by which the gods pass from the world of shades to the world of men. It is possible, though hardly probable, that some African caves (and the hills that contain them) have had an eerie reputation ever since men of the Broken Hill or the Boskop breed performed high magic in their innermost recesses. They have certainly been used as tombs for chiefs of many dynasties, time out of mind. If tribal tradition had fewer gaps and greater veracity, it would probably testify that those caves and hills that have become centres of Bantu worship owe their odour of sanctity to bones of the mighty dead that are hidden in them. Inaccessible caves and hills that touch the sky were thought to be secure and seemly sanctuaries for the relics of chiefs and sages of the tribal religion; and so, wrapped in the mystery of morning and evening haze and clad with rain-clouds as a ghostly garment, they became sacred solitudes and divine retreats.

Etshaneni (below Ubamabo) in Zululand has been the burying-place of the kings of the Ndwandwe from the time of Sigoti; and thither people flocked after the Festival of Firstfruits for a great annual Ceremony of Praises. Offshoots of that famous stock have kept the meaning of this worship clear; but often in Africa, as elsewhere, prescriptive religious festivals have outlived all memory of the events that gave them birth.

Buno, the Swazi chief, was buried in a cave in the hills some four miles from Lebombo. For some reason or other the body of his grandfather (Amaswazi) had been brought up from the low country to find sepulchre there, and there too his father (Umbadine) was buried. When Buno's turn came, his mortal remains were escorted thither by all his impis, laid in state beside his forbears, and guarded by a corps of medicine-men till time had done its work and no meddler with the black art could harm his soul.<sup>124</sup>

A religious festival was held every year in the Northern Transvaal in honour of a god who dwelt in a cave called *Legan-*

<sup>124</sup> *Adventures in Swaziland*. By Owen Rowe O'Neil. pp. 123-24.

*ana-ya-ga-Matsiakkwana*, which is in the hill above the town of the Maganana tribe. The praise-name by which this god was most widely known was 'Little-way-stripes-who-notices-the-feet-of-men.' I never heard how he came by his peculiar appellation, but I was told how his right to it was still maintained. There is a glade near his cave—a glade so sacred that any traveller who looks back after crossing it is supernaturally punished with wry-neck, or, to use their phrase, 'a neck like a hyena'. When wayfarers approached this glade by the declivity on one side, they might catch a glimpse of others on in front ascending the opposite slope, but when they reached the glade they found to their surprise that the footprints of those who preceded them had vanished and that the trail was marked with little wavy lines. The vanishing of the spoor and the marking of the path was supposed to be wrapt in mystery, but odd men who had cut their eye-teeth whispered that Chief Malaboch, high priest of the cave, kept henchmen hidden in the forest for the express purpose of obliterating the footprints of all who crossed this glade. This Malaboch (father of the one that the Boers captured) was a great 'rain-doctor'; chiefs from far and near (Montshiwa of the Baralong among the number, so it is said) were attracted by his fame and sat as disciples at his feet. At the annual festival the 'messenger of the cave' and the 'shepherds of the rites', ordained to their sacred offices by Malaboch himself, led forth the worshippers in single file, carrying baskets of corn and pots of beer. At the foot of the hill they rested and prayed, and then wended their way to the cave and poured their gifts into holes that had been dug, nobody knows when,<sup>125</sup> in the flat rocks at its mouth. As soon as these holes were filled, a great and joyous commotion was heard in the cave, and a piece of fat meat mysteriously appeared upon the rock—auspicious signs that sent the people home with gladness in their hearts. But woe to the miscreant who looked back as he left the sacred spot! He became spellbound—nevermore able to leave the place. Mag-

<sup>125</sup> Holes of this kind are found in a number of flat rocks between the Southern Tropic and the Zambesi. Some of those in the Thataganyane sandstone rocks at Serowe look like sockets in which poles were once planted; but Natives believe them to be mortars in which people of ancient tribes pounded corn when driven to find safety in caves and other fastnesses.



anana tribesmen believed that they went to this cave after death, and regarded the offerings as food for the dead. In time of drought one of the sacristans was sent to the cave with a black ox and an iron pot, and after he had entered the sacred precincts the hill was shrouded with a mist that left rust upon the pot. This rust was added to the farrago in Malaboch's rain-pots, and then it was not long before the land was refreshed with rain. I wonder whether Chief Malaboch's reputation as a 'rain-doctor' was founded upon the belief that the god in the cave was his ancestor. All the ritual points to that conclusion.

In the face of the hill upon which Kanye (Bechuanaland Protectorate) is built, there is a chasm into which the Bangwaketse used to hurl witches, and close by it a cave that some call *Phareñ* and others *Seipupi*.<sup>126</sup> *Seipupi* is, however, a praise-name of the god that dwells in this cavern. His proper name, or may be his courtesy-name, was *Rra Sentshadi*, which is an archaic form of *Rra-Sesadi*, showing that his first child was a girl, so some people told me, while others argued that it means 'Father-of-the-thing-that-causes-to-draw-out', though none of them could (or would?) tell me what that thing is. According to Bangwaketsi tradition, the man who discovered this cave found it so black and terrifying that he fled in dismay; and the crowd that he brought back to see the place heard a voice (some say many voices) coming from the darkness, but saw nothing. *Seipupi* was never seen; and his cave was too dreadful to approach. A rash man who once passed that way in the night was badly beaten by some invisible being, and heard a voice that made his blood run cold: "Don't tell a lie, or the god will strike you with the upper grindstone." The upper grindstone, I had better explain, is the large rounded pebble that people use for crushing oolitic hematite upon a slab of stone for cosmetic use; and the phrase is a metaphor for a bolt from the blue that drops a man in his tracks without a glimpse of his assailant. Even to this day if cattle or small stock happen to stray near the mouth of this cave, herd-boys leave them to their fate and run home as fast as they can, sure that due allowance will be made for a derelict-

<sup>126</sup> *Seipupi* means 'self-created thing' if the prefix *se-* refers to *seló*; but in this instance it presumably points to *sedimo* ('a spirit perceptible to one or more of the senses').

tion of duty that would entail a taste of the rod if caused by anything but a supernatural terror. Petitioners often brought *Seipupi* baskets of corn, or presents of beads (he preferred beads to other trinkets) and gave him a white ox in time of epidemic, and a black one when they wanted rain. Even then they did not venture too close to the cave. Clad in gala attire, they came as near as they dared, and then urged the ox to go forward alone. Immediately it reached the mouth of the cave, men shouted for joy, women burst into songs of gladness, and *Seipupi* responded in stentorian tones. Then they uttered their prayer: "We have come to beg for rain [or whatever their request was], *Thobéga-a-Phachwa! Rra-Sentshadi-co-o-kwa-Copywe!*"<sup>127</sup> And forthwith they returned home, knowing that if their gift was taken before the following morning, their prayer would be heard. Offering *Seipupi* a white ox in time of pestilence, or a black one in time of drought, betokens a belief that he was a spirit-lord of the land—a discarnate chief of long ago; and his name, *Rra-Sentshadi*, whether it alludes to his firstborn or to some phallic notion,<sup>128</sup> is compatible with this conjecture.

One of the names bestowed upon *Seipupi* in this prayer is *Thobéga-a-Phachwa*: who was he?

Two or three centuries ago ancestors of the Bahurutse, Bakwena, Bangwaketse, and Bamangwato tribes all dwelt together in the uplands from which the Marico and Ngotwane Rivers flow; and the Bahurutse remained in that district, moving occasionally from place to place as every Bantu community is obliged to do, after the other tribes had swarmed away. Robert Moffat found them at Mosega when he went to visit Moselekatse (*Umsiligazi*) in 1829;<sup>129</sup> but Umsiligazi had pounced upon the place some time before 1835.<sup>130</sup> It is possible that Mosega was also

<sup>127</sup> *Copywe* is the name of the ward of the town in which this cave is situated.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. SB. 286, 302, 305, 312.

<sup>129</sup> MLSSA. 516, 549.

<sup>130</sup> MLSSA. 578. Mosega is in the hills close to Zendlings Post, on the railway between Malmani and Zeerust. It was at Mosega that Maritz's commando surprised Umsiligazi early one morning and gave him the gruelling that helped him to turn his face towards the north. Zendlings Post owes its name to the fact that it was the home of two missionaries of the American Board (Lindley and Wilson) at the time when the Boers attacked Mosega. They had settled there with Umsiligazi's consent early in 1836, and a few months later Mrs. Wilson had died of fever (MLSSA. 586). Her grave was still marked with a pile of stones when I saw it in 1914.

occupied by Becwana at an earlier period, but the beginning of last century is not an unlikely date for what I am about to relate.

Tradition tells that while the Becwana were living at Mosega, a boy named Thobéga disappeared, and was not heard of for many years. Eventually, however, a tribesman wandering along the hills at sunset in search of stray cattle, was hailed by a stranger who bore some resemblance to the missing boy. "I am *Thobégo-a-Phachwa Tintibane*, the one-legged god," said the stranger; "I lived with you long ago." And he went on to wish that the people would gather at the cave where he dwelt and hear from him that there would be peace in the land and plenty of cattle. The tribesman took back word to the chief, and the chief led the people to the cave. There they heard a voice coming from the darkness, bidding them bring him a white ox; so they repaired to the cave next morning in all their finery, driving a white ox and singing the praise-songs of *Tintibane Thobégo-a-phachwa*. There is no clear distinction in Bantu thought or tradition between a tribal divinity and a person 'possessed' by him in some later generation.<sup>131</sup> The latter is called 'prophet' nowadays, but before that foreign nomenclature was imported into the district of which I am speaking he was called 'god' and addressed by the name of the god within him.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, the chronology and even the sequence of these old gods is uncertain. It is therefore impossible to determine whether this long-lost boy of Mosega was the original *Thobégo-a-Phachwa* or merely 'prophet' of an old god of that name. I sought information on this point, and found only discrepant opinions. Some said that this man's proper name was Thobéga, that he was the son of Phachwa, that he married Mmape, who was of the lineage of Tintibane, and that after his death she often heard his voice among the rafters of her hut warning her of impending events. Some asserted that he was called *Thobéga* or *Thobéla* (which they held to be interchangeable names) because he dared 'to break through'<sup>133</sup> into an awful cave that was sacred to the

<sup>131</sup> SB. 104-135.

<sup>132</sup> See SB. 113.

<sup>133</sup> *Go thoba* is 'to break through' (say, a fence), and *go thobéga* should be the middle form of this verb, denoting a state of being. But *thobéga* is the technical term for applying magical powder in the form of a cross to the footprints of a

old god *Tintibane*.<sup>134</sup> Others said that he was called *Thobéga-a-Phachwa* because an old god of that name, who was father of *Tintibane*, was speaking to the people through him. He was worshipped with corn, beans, and living animals, as other gods were, but he was also honoured with the firstfruits, with a white ox as a prayer for rain, and in time of war with a perfectly black ox as a prayer for strength to conquer their enemies—honours that are reserved for apotheosized chiefs, especially those who led their people into new lands and became spirits of fertility in the new districts where they left their bones.<sup>135</sup>

One or two other peculiarities of the ritual with which he was approached are not so easy to interpret. He was hailed as *Kompa*, *Mmamohape*, *Modimo-o-o-koto-lenwe-héla*, and *Tintibane*. *Kompa*, they told me, means 'something strong and immovable', and is the name of a god in the cave at Mosega; but when I inquired whether it was another name for *Thobéga* or the name of another divinity that shared that cave with him,<sup>136</sup> I found that nobody could be sure. *Mmamohape* ('Mother-wrap-round') may couple him with the python<sup>137</sup> or with some such legend as that of *Mmamohake*,<sup>138</sup> though the two names come from different verbs.<sup>139</sup> It is a woman's name at any rate; and, strange to say, women could approach *Thobéga's* cave without fear, though men did so at their peril. *Modimo-o-o-koto-lenwe-héla* ('One-legged-god') and *Tintibane* must be dealt with a few pages later.<sup>140</sup>

limping ox, which is thought to cure the ox of lameness; *go tlhaba thobéga* is 'to make an incision and insert a magical mixture'; and *go yewa thobéga* is the proper phrase for eating an ox slaughtered in honour of the man that drew first blood in a battle or killed the first beast in a tribal battue of big game. *Phachwa* is the colour-term for an ox with large patches of white on a black ground—the handsomest beast in a herd according to Becwana taste, and therefore a metaphor of admiration.

<sup>134</sup> See p. 69-75.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. SB. 81, 202f, 274. If the man in the cave was a 'prophet', these acts of homage would tell us nothing of his personal standing in the community, for the personality of a Bantu 'prophet' is merged in that of the god that has seized him; but they would still show that the god behind the 'prophet' was a chief who had brought his people into this new land; for a 'prophet' demands only what is due to his unseen lord.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. SB. 330f.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. SB. 161, 165f, 215.

<sup>138</sup> See SB. 197.

<sup>139</sup> *Go boha* is 'to bind'; *go hapa* is 'to bind things in a bundle by wrapping something round them'. *Go hapana pelo* is, however, 'to be spell-bound.'

<sup>140</sup> See pp. 69-75.

The fact that gods whose caves are scores of miles apart are lauded with the same praise-names and endowed with the same physical peculiarity may be due to one of three causes. (1) A god may have no connection with a particular cave except that his 'prophet' once dwelt there;<sup>141</sup> and if a 'prophet' of some other god of ancient renown tenanted the same cave a few generations later, there would be inevitable confusion of gods in the resultant legends. (2) It is possible, however, that the gods themselves were of the same lineage and entitled to bask in the same glory.<sup>142</sup> (3) But it is more likely that they belonged to dynasties that vanished from the district at different periods and were afterwards confused for want of heirs to keep their memory green.<sup>143</sup>

The Becwana say that their ancestors found this country sparsely peopled with Bakgalagadi and Bushmen.<sup>144</sup> 'Bakgalagadi' is their omnibus term for little communities that they found living on the fringe of the Kalahari Desert and easily reduced to serfdom. These were outlying settlements from what Portuguese discoverers of the East Coast grandiloquently called the Monomotapa Empire and mistakenly credited with the production of hill-forts, temples, and gold-workings that had fallen into ruin centuries earlier. They were Makalaka, Mashona, Barozwi, Bawenda, Bapedi, Bathonga,<sup>145</sup> &c.—many of them hill-loving people who are not at all unlikely to have buried chiefs in some of these caves. "Some [Mashona] tribes will only bury in caves and not in the ground, lest the spirit of the dead should find a difficulty in escaping;"<sup>146</sup> and others prefer cave-burials for their chiefs. The dynastic title of the head of the ruling family of the Mahungwe tribe in the Rusape district of Mashonaland

<sup>141</sup> Cf. p. 38.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. SB. 81f, 202f, 274, 330.

<sup>143</sup> Contrast the prayer of the Lebombo chief cited in SB. 242.

<sup>144</sup> Old men have told me that there were two varieties of Bushmen in the country when they were young, and that they lost sight of the taller kind some fifty years ago.

<sup>145</sup> A valley in the Cwaponong Hills is still called *Phata ea Baloyi*, a Thonga clan that is said to have come there from the Banyai country and to have left no descendants in the Protectorate.

<sup>146</sup> MLC. 43. The belief that earth would embarrass the dead is found in many parts of Africa, and has given rise to various burial-customs. See SB. 56, 70n, 165, 282f. This fear was "expressed in Rome by a formula so very usual that it was recalled in epitaphs by initials only: 'S(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(evis)', 'May earth be light for thee'." (ALRP. 46.)

is *Makoni*. "Makoni's body," says Bullock,<sup>147</sup> "will be mummified by being sealed up and dried within a special hut. When this process is completed, a bull will be killed, and the mummy wrapped in the skin, and placed in a cave with his ancestors in a lifelike sitting posture." A writer in *Nada*, the Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual,<sup>148</sup> after calling attention to a tradition that the thirteenth predecessor of the present Makoni died while the tribe was on its way to its present abode and that his relics were brought into the country with them, adds this comment: "The site of the cave where the Makoni chiefs are buried can be known to only comparatively few, but it is said that there are three or four rows of corpses buried there in a seated posture, sewn up in ox hides, so probably the thirteen dead Makoni mentioned is not far short of the number."

*Thoho-ea-Ndou* ('Elephant-head') seems to have ruled people of diverse lineage in a very extensive country on both sides of the Limpopo River before leading his own people, the Bawenda, into the Zoutpansberg at the beginning of the eighteenth century. After his death the Bawenda split into three sections, under his three sons, and lost control of the Makalaka in the north and the Basuto south of the Dwars River. The Bawenda still acknowledge three gods, named *Kosane*, *Ralowimba*, and *Thovela*, in addition to their old chiefs and ancestors in the holy groves. Gottschling tells us nothing of the origin of these three gods. He implies that the Bawenda do not reckon them among their old chiefs, and specially mentions the fact that these gods do not share in the sacrifice of the firstfruits at which every known ancestor is named. But according to Gottschling *Thovela* of the Bawenda appears to resemble *Thobéga* of Mosega in character as well as in name. "Thovela is very favourably inclined towards mankind," he says, "and is, as it were, a mediator between God and man. He is the protector of the unborn child and of the pregnant woman, also of the stranger and visitor who is travelling through the country."<sup>149</sup>

One of our Native pastors who had had dealings with the Barotsi of the Zambesi valley in his earlier years told me that

<sup>147</sup> MLC. 45.

<sup>148</sup> December 1924, p. 87.

<sup>149</sup> R. BAAS. 1905 iii. 196, 211, 213. See also SB. 244.

some of them used to worship what he termed a hole in the ground, which they called *Setino-sa-ñwana-mpeñ*. He had not seen the hole and could only repeat what the people had told him. The name, he said, means the 'Setino-of-the-child-in-the-belly', but *Setino* was not a Secwana word and he did not know its meaning. He was informed that a herd of black hornless cows was devoted to the god, and that the people of the town near by took the milk of these cattle, 'with great meekness and reverence', to use his phrase, and poured it into the hole. If the god was displeased with the demeanour of the people, he rejected the milk, so that the first pitcherful caused the hole to overflow; but if the hole swallowed up all the milk that was poured into it, the pious folk shouted for joy that *Setino* had accepted their gift. This god was asked to do all kinds of helpful things for his worshippers, but those who carried milk to the hole in which he dwelt, like those who pay homage at many other Bantu shrines, had to be very careful not to look back as they left the place. Some student of anthropology in the Zambezi valley may one day discover what facts lie behind this singular story; but meanwhile it may not be amiss to note the legend that clings to what may else be mistaken for the worship of a Nature-spirit. Ages ago, a chief of the Barotsi, having warned his people that he was about to die and that water would issue from this hole, planted a tree near by, saying that he was making a shade for himself; and when soon afterwards he mysteriously disappeared and water flowed from the hole, they knew that his discarnate spirit had made that place its temple.

There is said to be a cave in Vupanda, a sacred mountain near Ipole in Unyamwezi, which is occupied by spirits of whom very little is known; but inasmuch as the family of the local sultan is required by ancient custom to reverence the spirits of their ancestors by covering the head when they see the mountain, it is highly probable that the cave is peopled with glorified sultans of past ages. The Batuse of Ruanda, a Negro-Hamitic tribe, reserve a district for the burial of their kings, each king having a hill kept for his grave alone; a large house is built upon this hill and a grave dug inside it, and after the funeral the hill is so sacred that none of his successors will walk upon it.<sup>150</sup> Some

<sup>150</sup> GS. 190.

of the mountains which the Banyoro regard as residences of particular gods have precipitous faces, a hundred feet high, over which animal and at times human victims are hurled as sacrifices to the gods; others are extinct volcanoes with large craters, containing deep pools into which victims are cast. Of these pools one is especially famous because victims favoured by the god are seen later high up on the mountain side and still alive—which probably means that there is an unknown outlet from the crater.<sup>151</sup> The writer to whose careful observation we are indebted for this and much other valuable information, does not tell us whether the gods that dwell in the volcanic depths and fastnesses are Nature-spirits; but he does say: "The priests of the more important deities belonged to a special priestly clan and their offices were hereditary. They claimed to have the sole right to officiate in the service of the high gods and looked down upon the inferior priests who might be qualified for their office by training alone and not by descent." This is exactly what would have happened if the high gods were deified chiefs, the high priests heritors of the headship of their surviving clan, and the inferior priests mere experts of other lineage.

"There is a hill called Mukongo between Kilungu and Mwea, some fifteen miles south of Machakos, which is said to be haunted by innumerable *Aiimu*, the place is covered with thick bush and people are afraid to go there. . . . It is said that if anyone in the neighbourhood dies and if, within a few days after death, a friend of the deceased visits these haunted woods he may see his dead friend walking about there."<sup>152</sup> "In Kitui district, in the part known as Kini near the village of Ndama wa Nthuku, there is said to be a cave (*Ngunga*) called Kapia. This is believed to be a favourite abode of the *Aiimu* and at night the voices of children can be heard calling from it. If a person dies in a village near by, the footsteps of the deceased are seen next morning leading to the cave."<sup>153</sup> "There is a sacred rock near Thembigwa, close to a stream called Kichii—a tributary of the Ruaraka—where the natives pluck tufts of grass as they pass and throw them on the rock."<sup>154</sup> The spirits that

<sup>151</sup> SCA. 214.

<sup>152</sup> AK. 87.

<sup>153</sup> AK. 88.

<sup>154</sup> BBM. 34.



dominate the sacred hills, caves and woods of the first and second quotations in this paragraph are ancestor-spirits beyond a doubt; and all that we know of Bantu worship leads us to suspect that the sacred rock at Thembigwa is somehow associated with the dead—possibly, like the cairns, with someone who was suddenly launched into eternity (to use our slovenly metaphor) at this spot.

In his idyll of the death and burial of 'Great Wind',<sup>155</sup> Fraser mentions a 'tribal god who lives in the mist-capped mountain.' A comely slave-girl, not yet provided with a husband of her own, had been picked out as one of those who should enter the underworld in the train of their lord; but while she was being led, stupid with terror, to the edge of the grave in which some of the Chief's women had already been laid as a couch for their master, the dust of the dry earth entered her nostrils and she sneezed violently. Whereupon, the presiding witch-doctor, convinced that the spirits had spoken in that sneeze, stayed the executioner's hand; and she was loosened from her bonds. Henceforth, however, she was set apart as wife of the god in the mountain. Now why should this ghostly dweller in the hill-top claim the maid who had been so strangely delivered from death by the spirits of the graveside? By what right did he claim ultimate succession to the maiden? Who was he? No artist mars the symmetry of his idyll with dull genealogical details that are grist to a necrologist's mill; but it may be inferred, I think, that in the first half of last century, 'Great Wind' was chief of one of the many loose and brawling communities into which the Batumbuka tribe had divided after the passing of its last paramount chief.<sup>156</sup> Was the hill-god an ancient and honoured paramount chief of 'Great Wind's' tribe? The only advocate whom his godship recognized was a certain village headman who had inherited priestly power from his fathers; but perhaps the 'wild and stormy chief' was heir to a dashing junior son of the Tumbuka Dynasty who had robbed a weaker elder brother of some portion of his birthright but was disqualified by juniority from exercising sacerdotal functions; or, maybe,

<sup>155</sup> AI. 159-73.

<sup>156</sup> AA. 18.

the village headman was senior surviving representative, not of the old Tumbuka line, but of a still older line which had made the hill-top sacred with the bones of its chiefs before the Batumbuka came into the district. Bantu conquerors have often spared a priest of such a line, sure that he would intercede for them with the old gods of the land in an emergency.

FOUNTAINS

In Africa bubbling springs are exceptional enough to demand explanation from people who have practically no interest in physics. The phenomenon is usually attributed to a serpent that is believed to have its home in the rock;<sup>157</sup> but Kafirs say that the genius of the fountain is a person named Icanti, who dwells therein and perpetually stirs up the water. Leaves or grass may be thrown into the water to pacify it before drinking, but no worship appears to be rendered to fountains, save in that part of the country where Bantu culture is most likely to be influenced by Hamitic and Semitic notions. "On the eastern side of the Luenzori range there are two or three places where boiling springs are found. In many of them the natives have long been accustomed to take vapour baths when suffering from fever or rheumatism. At one place the bubbling of the water under a rock can be both heard and felt; the people will tell you that a rock-spirit dwells there and makes his presence known by this noise. They used to make offerings here whenever there were severe earthquake shocks. These shocks are of frequent occurrence and are sometimes severe enough to make it difficult to sit at table."<sup>158</sup> Certain wells in Uganda were assumed to be inhabited by water-sprites, and were accordingly venerated; a sacred meal was eaten at some of them, or at shrines of the water-sprites hard by; and a few of these naiads were appeased with sacrifices of animals and even human beings—often enough a man offered his own child.<sup>159</sup>

<sup>157</sup> The Hottentots believe that a serpent dwells near every spring and that the fountain dries up if the serpent departs; but no worship is rendered to such serpents. (Quatrefages: *Pygmies*, p. 233.)

<sup>158</sup> SCA. 124.

<sup>159</sup> Bg. 458-9.

## TREES, GROVES, &amp;C.

The Bantu are not much concerned with natural beauty, apart from fertility, but a fine tree appeals to them. Chiefs take it as a compliment if you describe them as lordly trees, with many branches and ample shade; and retainers hold their heads high as they call themselves 'branches of the chief.' A luckless Becwana hunter selects any towering and umbriferous tree in the game-lands, marks out a circle in its shadow, and, having swept this primitive temple clear of leaves and other litter, stands in it and invokes the aid of his gods; and when his divine fathers have relented, it is to this circle under the tree that he takes the game which they have sent to stay his hunger, and there presents them with their portion of the prey. An outsider might mistake this for tree-worship, but the tree—any tree, the finer the better—is but a trysting-place for him and gods that once were men.

When a chief falls in battle abroad, his grave is dug under the finest tree within reach; and it is not at all uncommon for a chief who dies at home to be buried in the shade of some monarch of the adjacent forest. The chiefs of Loango are buried near two mighty baobab trees on a hill at Lubu.<sup>180</sup> The Bavili say that their dead are preserved within the hollow trunk of a baobab tree,<sup>181</sup> and the statement is as likely to be literal as figurative. The Negrillos, a pygmy people who roam in the equatorial forests of Africa, appear to make it a general practice to bury their dead in the hollow trunks of trees or else in streams.<sup>182</sup> "The earliest race that has left records in the Campagna in Italy enclosed its dead in hollow trunks of trees. The same custom appeared in northern Europe during the later Bronze Age."<sup>183</sup> In some parts of Oceania, the temporary exposure of corpses upon the branches of trees, or occasionally in hollow trunks, is found among interior tribes and nomadic bush-peoples; so is the final burial of corpses in hollow trees. This appears to be due chiefly to topographical conditions, hollow trees being a con-

<sup>180</sup> BBMM. 8-9.

<sup>181</sup> BBMM. 133.

<sup>182</sup> RP. 128. See also my p. 16.

<sup>183</sup> SCD. 121.

venient alternative to caves or other secret places.<sup>164</sup> In 1882, I saw, in what is now called the Tanganyika Territory, not a few hollow baobabs that were said to serve as graves for the Wagogo of neighbouring tembes.<sup>165</sup> "The Abarambo<sup>166</sup> chief, Mburo, had chosen for himself a large tree situated at a short distance from his house", writes Casati, who was witness of the fact, "and had given orders that, when he died, they should dig a hole in its upper part and lay him there, his face turned towards heaven, for he thought it dishonouring for a great chief to be brought into close contact with the earth."

The Ovaherero dig their graves near a tree, selecting if possible a giraffe-acacia; and it is this close association between the grave and the camel-thorn that leads them to call the latter *omuhivirikua* ('the-praise-one').

People with whom Macdonald lived on the Shire uplands at the beginning of the last quarter of last century, had their burial-places on the side of the mountain, beyond the fields; but the tree at the verandah of the great man's house was his temple. If no tree grew there, it was customary to erect a little shade under which they performed their simple rites; and if this spot became so public that the offerings were likely to be defiled, they removed the sanctuary to a carefully selected spot under some beautiful tree.<sup>167</sup> Around Lake Nyasa, Miss Werner says:<sup>168</sup> "Every village has its 'prayer-tree' under which the sacrifices are offered. It stands usually in the *bwalo*, the open space which Mr. Macdonald calls 'the forum', and is, sometimes at any rate, a wild fig-tree. Livingstone says, 'It is a sacred tree all over Africa and India'; and I learn from M. Auguste Chevalier that it is found in every village of Senegal and French Guinea, and looked on as a 'fetich tree'." She suggests that where the prayer-tree is quite outside the village, it is likely that the site of the village has been shifted or that the spirit is one of the 'old gods of the

<sup>164</sup> *The Life After Death in Oceania, &c.* By Rosalind Moss, B. Sc. Oxon. pp. 157-160.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. also Cameron's *Across Africa*, i. 120.

<sup>166</sup> Abarambo are a clan of Ababua Bantu, who live north of the Wele as subjects of the Nyamnyams (GGC. 650, 675).

<sup>167</sup> A. i. 60, 109.

<sup>168</sup> NBCA. 63.

land'.<sup>169</sup> Dr. Stannus, writing of the Machinga Yao, says:<sup>170</sup> "In passing through a millet garden, if a child asks his mother to give him some to eat, she plucks a bunch or two and reverently laying one at the foot of a *msoro* tree for the spirits or at the base of some other tree, if she cannot see a *msoro*, she gives the rest to the child. . . . With the exception of the *msoro* tree above mentioned (*ndima*, Chin.), and possibly another called *nsilanyama* (Chin.), which is never used as firewood and which is supposed to be used by *msawi*, I do not think there are any sacred trees properly so-called. Miss Werner supposes that many of the big trees (often a species of *Ficus*) in villages are sacred. The truth is, I believe, simply that a village is made naturally round a big tree which conveniently offers its shade for the village meeting place. The spirits of deceased chiefs may be supposed to live in such trees. They are convenient natural objects for them to occupy, in fact practically the only ones to be found in villages. Trees may secondarily, therefore, be looked upon as in some degree sacred. About such trees strings or pieces of calico may be placed as an offering to the spirits of the departed. But the Yao do not erect little huts in their vicinity, hung about with strips of calico as is the custom among the Anyanja."

Fraser, writing of the Abangoni, says:<sup>171</sup> "The villages were broken to pieces, and the people moved away to the Kasitu valley where they built for themselves new dwellings. The kraal [cattle-kraal] beneath which the dead chief lay buried was left standing in the midst of a dreary ruin. Some of the poles with which it had been built, striking root, grew into little trees that sent forth leaf-bearing branches. The old village site was soon a desolation of dismantled huts and broken pots. But when the rainy season came a dense growth sprang up on the soil, which had been enriched by a few years of insanitary residence. So the dead chief lay in the midst of a thicket of luxuriant life." And on the next page he mentions that a regiment subsequently offered sacrifice at this grave. But in another book, speaking of the same country—the country that the Batumbuka occupied before the Abangoni seized

<sup>169</sup> NBCA. 50; cf. my p. 4.

<sup>170</sup> *The Wayao of Nyasaland*. By Hugh Stannus Stannus, M. D., M. R. C. P. (Lond.) &c. (Harvard African Studies, Vol. III, 1922.) p. 315.

<sup>171</sup> AA. 30-31.

it<sup>172</sup>—he writes:<sup>173</sup> “There still stand throughout the land great giants of the forest that have been sacred from time immemorial. They were living things and were worshipped accordingly. When decayed branches fell no one would venture to pick them up. There are bare stretches of land on which nothing but stunted bush grows, and over which the women laboriously search for firewood, yet in the midst of the scrub such a giant may be seen, with quantities of dead wood lying around, which no one is so sacrilegious as to gather. These trees were holy places, and hence became the haunts of some of the ancestral spirits; and so underneath the shade little temples to the departed spirits would be built, where offerings might be placed. But these temples were not for the tree-spirit, they were for the ancestors who chose that sacred ground for their abode. Worship of the hills and trees, like that of the sub-gods, was not an independent action of the individual, but the united invocation of the clan or tribe.” Again, in his latest book, Fraser mentions those magic twigs on a Native’s bow that give him confidence as he takes careful aim, and then goes on to say:<sup>174</sup> “Now if ancestral spirits dwell in these little things, more certainly are the great things of nature full of their presence. With their magnitude grows the greatness and power of the spirit essence that is in them. This deep pool, this ancient spreading tree, this high hill that raises its head into the clouds, these all have soul too, and there the mighty spirits dwell. These greater spirits are the gods of the clan and the nation. They are not worshipped by private individuals but by the official representative, the priest of clan or nation. Men have told me that they have seen the spirit enter the pool in the form of a serpent, and some have seen the mighty spirit of the nation come from the hill, which is his corporeal form, like a great snake with a fiery head.”

It would be interesting to hear why Dr. Fraser assumes that tribes of the Nyasa uplands believe the magical gimcracks on their bows to be tenanted by spirits of people, and their sacred pools and trees and hills by spirits of things. Available evidence, so far as I can discern its drift, seems to indicate that the order

<sup>172</sup> AA. 18.

<sup>173</sup> WPP. 123.

<sup>174</sup> NA. 36.

should be reversed, though it would be rash to dogmatize on this subject till it has been more extensively and intensively explored by *well-equipped workers who are unhampered by tradition*. I think we must admit that Bantu thought and feeling endows every separate thing with a soul of its own and holds that some daring and adroit people can conjure these souls into mascots of one sort or another and turn their special capabilities to account; and I should not be surprised to learn that some amulets are quickened with material from the corpse or grave of a great marksman or hunter, thus becoming tiny reliquaries of the dead, though evidence on that point is at present inadequate.<sup>175</sup> But the fact that the gods come forth from pools and trees and hills as great snakes and are worshipped, not by private individuals, but by the official representative of clan and nation, suggests that they are spirits of the mighty dead, probably founders of dynasties whose adventures have faded from the memory of man but whose bones still consecrate the spots in which they lie.<sup>176</sup> We know the origin of the Abangoni divinity in his thicket of luxuriant life; why should we suppose that Tumbuka clan-gods in their ancient trees had a different origin? The former is new and unmistakable, the latter are old and clothed with the mystery of ages: is there any other difference?

Weule speaks of the Natives of the Makonde plateau, on the left of the Rovuma River, as being tree-worshippers,<sup>177</sup> explaining, however, that they do not worship the spirit of the tree, but an *ancestor-spirit that takes up its abode therein*. He noticed no such trees in the plains, among the Yaos in particular, but found them very common on the plateau, where it was customary to plant a sapling at the head of the grave; and he mentions enormous trees with mighty trunks sixty feet high and more, where only the old men remember that anyone is buried. He confesses that he was unable to make out whether the Natives believe that the spirit has its abode for a time in these trees, for he found it exceedingly difficult to get any definite statements at all as to the abiding-place of the soul. That is a difficulty with which we are all faced when we try to make out whether such

<sup>175</sup> Cf. SB. 54, 56, 258-262, 305, 321f, 328f, 333.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. SB. 81, 257.

<sup>177</sup> NLEA. 324-27.

trees are habitats or merely haunts of the spirits: the Natives themselves do not know, and are satisfied with the assurance that these trees are trysting-places for the spirit and its worshippers. It is another variety of mental confusion between the grave and the underworld.

The pseudonymous writer of an article on *The Savage as Scientist* in *Blackwood's Magazine* (May, 1927) mentions "a huge and ancient wild fig-tree standing on the Dulumo Plains of the sub-province of Mkalama in Tanganyika"—a tree with "mighty branches, some forty and fifty feet in length, sweeping out as a leafy canopy above the heads" of the people. He says: "The tree is claimed by the Anakumi clan of the Iramba tribe to be the dwelling-place of the spirit of Chief Kitandu, the founder and original paramount chief of their clan, and subsequently chief of all Iramba. . . . He reigned at least four centuries ago, probably longer ago than that. When any member of the Anakumi clan does anything to affront the sacred memory of Kitandu, the angry spirit of the chief inside the tree is said to uproot the mighty bole and hurl the tree crashing to the ground. While the writer was in charge of the Anakumi, one of the chiefs came in to the boma, or outpost headquarters, to say that this had happened, that the tree was lying prone and shattered on the ground, and that it would be imperative for the Anakumi clan to hold sacrificial ritual to appease Kitandu's angry ghost. Permission for this ritual was accorded, and the writer attended the ceremony. . . . The chief medicine-man slaughtered the ox and the goats and sprinkled their blood, mingled with the beer, upon the bole of the tree." The writer of this paper had evidently been privileged to see one of those major sacrifices with which a Bantu clan salves its conscience when much disturbed by a sense of transgression—or rather to be present at it; for the eye sees only what it brings with it the power of seeing, and he had an eye for hypnotism rather than Bantu religion. By treating Bantu hyperbole as if it were a phrase in mathematics or law and ignoring the enormous emotional value of religious ritual to a conscience-stricken clan, he is driven to the conclusion that he has witnessed a remarkable case of mass hypnotism, in which a medicine-man convinced a crowd of "over three thousand savages of all ages and both sexes" that



they first saw the hoary old giant of the plain lying shattered on the ground and then saw it rising at the bidding of his uplifted arms to stand once more upon its base and rear its mighty branches again towards the sky. My coefficient of credulity is too low for this kind of thing, but I am glad to register the fact that the sacrifice was offered to the founder of the clan who had somehow come to be linked with this grand old tree, not to a tree-spirit proper.

Weeks, writing of the Boloki of the Upper Congo, says:<sup>178</sup> "I found only one tree that is supposed to have a spirit, and that is the tree used for ordeal purposes. When a person wants to take the rootlets of the ordeal tree (*nka*), he first selects the tree, then spreads a leaf on the closed fist of his left hand, and strikes it with the palm of his right hand. If the leaves on the tree tremble in response, he knows the tree is strong and fit to use; but if they remain quiescent, it is a sign that the ordeal property (*nka*) is weak and unfit for its purpose, so another tree is sought, until he finds one that responds in sympathy to the striking of the leaf."

That trees have spirits, like everything else in the world, and that magicians possess the secret of controlling them, are undoubtedly articles of the Bantu creed; but what we want to discover is whether the Bantu worship such spirits.

During their visit to Kikuyu, the Routledges noticed that "in addition to the sacred groves which are usually found on hill-tops, a certain species of giant forest-tree is considered sacred and is always preserved. It is known as the *mi-ti mi-gu* and is a form of ficus."<sup>179</sup> Brevity of sojourn and unacquaintance with the local vernacular made it impossible for these observers to discover the workings of the tribal mind; but Hobley, who has made a much more extensive and intensive study of the thought and practice of Akamba and Akikuyu tribesmen, also reports that the Akikuyu have for each village and for each communal group a sacred tree of the wild fig kind, at which sacrifices to Engai are offered, and that sacrifices to the ancestors are never offered at these particular trees.<sup>180</sup> Engai demands closer study than we

<sup>178</sup> ACC. 275.

<sup>179</sup> PP. 38.

<sup>180</sup> BBM. 40-48, 50. A goddess who lived in a sycamore tree and fed the dead, figures in ancient Egyptian religion. (RLAE. 188-89, 198-99.) Krapf, who paid

can bestow upon him at the moment; but if he should turn out to be the spirit of some dynastic celebrity to whom tribes that have long been independent of one another were once all subject,<sup>181</sup> it would follow, of course, that sacrifices to ancestral spirits of other lineage would not be offered at his shrines. The Akamba say that ancestor-spirits haunt or inhabit certain sacred fig-trees, the good preferring one variety and the bad another; and the people build miniature huts (called *nyumba wa aiimu*) at the foot of each kind. Hobley asserts, further, that examples of this belief are to be found at most places along the east coast of Africa, always reinforced with the fear that sacrilegious trespassers in a sacred grove will be assailed with a shower of missiles.<sup>182</sup> So far, Hobley's evidence is in accord with that of students in other Bantu areas; but there is more to follow.

"The charms," he says,<sup>183</sup> "usually consist of powdered wood, roots and herbs. The advice of a medicine-man is sought and he recommends a certain plant or tree. Grain is taken to the plant or tree indicated, and six times a single grain is thrown at the tree, the remainder of the grain being thrown the seventh time only. This possibly signifies a sacrifice to the spirit of the tree. The plant is then dug up, or a piece of wood cut off the root of the tree and dried and powdered. Sometimes a firebrand and water are taken to the tree; in this case, the water is placed on the ground, and the suppliant, closing his eyes, walks six times round the tree, then stands under it, facing east, and prays, with his eyes still closed: 'Tree, I have a favour to ask—I have a sick child or wife or brother'—*as the case may be*—'and know not the origin of his sickness, as he has no trouble with anyone. I come to ask a favour. I come to you, O Tree, to treat him for it that he may be cured.' " And again,<sup>184</sup> "When clearing a forest to make a cultivated field, the Kikuyu people generally leave a large and conspicuous tree in the clearing. Such a tree is believed

particular attention to the Galla nation during his residence in Shoa, tells us that they regard the Woda tree as the dwelling-place of a spirit (he does not say what sort of a spirit) and sacrifice oxen and sheep annually to their highest deity, Waka, at the very sacred Worka tree (*Ficus sycamorus*), Woda Nabi, by the river Hawash. (TRML. 77.)

<sup>181</sup> See SB. 77, 180, 202.

<sup>182</sup> AK. 85. BBM. 28, 65, and cf. my page 36.

<sup>183</sup> BBM. 25.

<sup>184</sup> BBM. 31-33.

to collect the spirits from all other trees which have been cut down in the vicinity. We have here an interesting example of animism, the spirits so collected being most emphatically declared to be tree, and not human spirits. Now if this tree shows signs of decay and is liable to be blown down, they decide to fell it." After mentioning that if it were blown down, its spirit would avenge the neglect, he describes the sacrifice of a red ram at the felling, so that as the spirits leave it and settle in other trees they may do so without anger. "The Akamba at Kibwezi," he continues, "have a similar belief: before cutting down a big solitary tree in a clearing, an elder and a very old woman must pour beer and corn at its foot;" and he adds that in Ukamba of Ulu it is considered absolute sacrilege to fell a sacred tree at which ancestral sacrifices are offered, and that other large trees which appear to have no special sanctity are felled only after offerings of beer and a prayer beseeching the spirit which lives there to move to another tree.

These are striking passages from a writer who has bestowed much thought upon his subject. Bantu magicians everywhere profess to control the spirits of trees, and of everything else, by magical means; but this is more than magic. Does it hark back to rites connected with tree-totems that have disappeared in most other Bantu communities? The tribal name, Akikuyu, bears a suspicious resemblance to their name for the sacred fig-tree, *mikuyu*.<sup>185</sup> Is there any connection between the two? Johnstone suggests that the basal root of the tribal name may be *-kuyu* ('fish');<sup>186</sup> but, with a modesty that is not always conspicuous in his pages, he puts forth the suggestion in a very tentative manner.

That tree-totemism once prevailed among the Bantu, or at any rate, among the forbears of the Bantu, can hardly be denied: but the marks of its former existence are so scanty that one would be surprised to find it still extant among Akikuyu and Akamba.

Sacred trees are found in many parts of the world. "The Irish *bile* was a sacred tree, of great age, growing over a holy well or fort. Five of them are described in the *Dindsenchas*, and one was an oak, which not only yielded acorns, but nuts and apples. . . . Another Irish *bile* was a yew described in a poem as a

<sup>185</sup> AK. 85 and cf. SB. 249.

<sup>186</sup> CSBSL. ii. 29.

'firm strong god.' . . . The other *bile* were ash-trees, and from one of them the *Fir Bile*, 'men of the tree', were named—perhaps a totem-clan. The lives of kings and chiefs appear to have been connected with these trees, probably as representatives of the spirit of vegetation embodied in the tree, and under their shadow they were inaugurated. . . . Tribal and personal names point to belief in descent from tree gods or spirits and perhaps to totemism. The Eburones were the yew-tree tribe (*eburos*); the Bituriges perhaps had the mistletoe for their symbol, and their surname Vivisci implies that they were called 'Mistletoe men'. . . . Other names like Guidgen (*Viduo-genos*, 'son of the tree'), Dergen (*Dervo-genos*, 'son of the oak'), Guerngen (*Verno-genos*, 'son of the alder'), imply filiation to a tree. Though these names became conventional, they express what had once been a living belief." So much for the tree-totemism that used to prevail in our own British Isles; but that is not all; the same writer goes on immediately to say:<sup>187</sup> "The veneration of trees growing beside burial mounds or megalithic monuments was probably a pre-Celtic cult continued by the Celts. The tree embodied the ghost of the person buried under it, but such a ghost could then hardly be differentiated from a tree spirit or divinity. Even now in Celtic districts extreme veneration exists for trees growing in cemeteries and in other places. It is dangerous to cut them down or to pluck a leaf or branch from them, while in Breton churchyards the yew is thought to spread a root to the mouth of each corpse. The story of the grave of Cyperissa, daughter of a Celtic king in the Danube region, from which first sprang 'the mournful cypress', is connected with universal legends of trees growing from the graves of lovers until their branches intertwine. These embody the belief that the spirit of the dead is in the tree, which was thus in all likelihood the object of a cult. Instances of these legends occur in Celtic story. Yew-stakes driven through the bodies of Naisi and Deirdre to keep them apart, became yew-trees the tops of which embraced over Armagh Cathedral. A yew sprang from the grave of Bailé Mac Buain, and an apple-tree from that of his lover Aillinn, and the top of each had the form of their heads. The identification of tree and ghost is here complete."

<sup>187</sup> RAC. 201-203.

Does this help us to an understanding of the tree-worship which Hobley describes? The Kikuyu and Kamba highlands must be well sprinkled with graves of old-time immigrants who took possession of the hunting-veld, grazing-lands, or soil, and the Masai are not the only ones of Northern origin. Tree-worship is still practised in Ashanti;<sup>188</sup> and the sacred Woda tree of the Gallas was mentioned a page or two ago. Bantu tribesmen have been long familiar with the notion that a tree which overhangs a grave is the bower of the spirit whose earthly relics lie beneath its shade, and much too wary to infringe the spirit's prerogative, and the sacredness of a tree is likely to remain among them after the circumstance that gave it sanctity has passed from memory. I often heard Becwana (especially of the southern tribes) speak of worshipping *dithóta*—a phrase that comes to the lips of Basuto more readily than any of its synonyms; and *dithóta* means 'graves', or, to be precise, 'mounds'; but a diplomatic inquiry never failed to elicit the explanation that what they worshipped was the spirit whose bones lay therein, not the grave that contained them.<sup>189</sup> Would they be more likely to discriminate in common speech between a tree and the spirit which owns it?

There is another possibility that must be considered in any attempt to grasp the philosophy behind the phenomena that Hobley describes: it may be that these trees are related to ancestor-spirits in much the same way as certain consecrated sheep and cattle are, though even then we should perhaps have to fall back upon vestiges of some almost forgotten tree-totemism to explain the selection of specific varieties for this purpose. In Buganda, a man about to break up new land received trees from the gods of his family, or usually two branches of a bark-cloth tree,<sup>190</sup> and planted them near the site of the new house which he proposed to build. At the roots of these trees he poured libations to the gods Mukasa and Kaumpuli,—the former a god of healing and benignity and the latter a god of plague.<sup>191</sup> The

<sup>188</sup> AS. 258-59, 261-64.

<sup>189</sup> Umhlaba, 'the earth', is a Zulu name for the Amatongo, and Callaway takes it to mean 'the Abapansi' or 'Subterraneans.' (RSZ. 147.)

<sup>190</sup> Bark-cloth trees are propagated by planting live branches, six or eight feet long and three or four inches in diameter.

<sup>191</sup> Bg. 427.

king of Buganda practised a similar custom: upon entering a new enclosure, he had trees planted in the open space before his gate, to represent the various gods; and when he wished to conciliate a particular god, he had a libation of beer poured at the root of the tree that stood for that divinity.<sup>192</sup> When the head of a family received a grant of land from the *Wami* (hereditary clan-head) of a district in Busoga,<sup>193</sup> he received from him at the same time a tree which he planted in his new holding, and when he died, his son buried him in this ground and claimed it as his own by virtue of the tree and of his father's grave.<sup>194</sup>

In both these instances we have an inkling of a possible connection between a tree and a discarnate spirit; but what shall we say of another custom which prevails in Busoga? "If there was any suspicion that the death had been caused by magic, the chief wife of the dead man caught a little of the earth that was first thrown into the grave, and made it into a little ball which she threw over some tree near. This act freed the spirit of the dead man which might otherwise be held in bondage by the person who caused the death."<sup>195</sup> It would be interesting and helpful to discover the philosophy that lies at the back of this strange ritual. In view of what has been said above concerning the intimate association of a spirit with the ground in which its corpse lies and with the tree that grows near by, should we be warranted in assuming that the wife, by throwing a handful of his grave-earth over the tree, enables the spirit of her husband to escape from the toils of the wicked magician and take up its abode in the tree?

According to Roscoe, "these spirits of trees and of water were of quite a different order from the spirits of men, but though they were not ghosts, they possessed superhuman power and were able to injure people if offended and to make them

<sup>192</sup> Bg. 378.

<sup>193</sup> The people of Busoga and the peasantry of Kitara (or Bunyoro, as the Baganda nicknamed it in derision) are described as purely negro, while the ruling race in the latter country are Negro-Hamites; but inasmuch as they have inherited a Bantu language and dwell on the borders of Bantu Africa, where interplay of cultural influences is inevitable, their customs may have some bearing upon our problem.

<sup>194</sup> GS. 99.

<sup>195</sup> GS. 129.

prosper if pleased";<sup>196</sup> and it must be confessed that some customs with regard to spirits in trees which he has recorded respond readily to this interpretation. He tells us, for instance, that in Busoga all big trees were feared because they were the abode of spirits; that before felling such a tree for the sake of its timber, it was necessary that a goat or a sheep should be tied to it and then slaughtered and eaten by the lumbermen in communion with the tree-spirit;<sup>197</sup> that if the tree were to be made into a canoe, a string of cowrie-shells was often tied round its trunk, in addition to the goat or sheep that was offered, and the presiding priest besought the spirit not to be annoyed and to allow the tree to be cut down and made into a canoe; that before launching, a fowl or a goat was again sacrificed to the spirit and its blood poured into the bows of the canoe; and that inasmuch "as the spirit was supposed to accompany the boards, which formed the canoe, offerings were made to it from time to time whenever a fishing expedition or a long journey was contemplated."<sup>198</sup> In Kitara, "before the carpenter attempted to cut down the (*musoga*) tree for his work he had to take to the tree-spirit an offering, generally a basket of millet and beans, though he might take something of greater value, at times even a goat, in order that the tree-spirit might consent to the tree's being cut down, and that the dishes might shape without cracking;"<sup>199</sup> and when a carpenter felled a tree for making drums, he not only observed certain taboos and kept apart from his wife during the previous night,<sup>200</sup> but went to the tree with a priest and there sacrificed a fowl, a goat or a sheep, which was cooked and eaten on the spot.<sup>201</sup>

The time has not come, I think, for any final or dogmatic pronouncement concerning the nature of these tree-dwelling spirits that are worshipped. Our knowledge of Bantu religion is still patchy; even its most accomplished students are often driven, in their desire to hold the scales even, to substitute likely hypotheses for positive judgments. Perhaps the fairest verdict that

<sup>196</sup> GS. 109.

<sup>197</sup> GS. 108-109.

<sup>198</sup> GS. 114-15.

<sup>199</sup> KT. 229.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. pp. 124 ff.

<sup>201</sup> KT. 230.

could be passed at present, would run somewhat as follows:—Of these tree-dwelling spirits that are worshipped, the vast majority are undoubtedly of human origin; worship of genuine tree-spirits has died out in most Bantu tribes—if it ever existed in them, but, since it is in vogue beyond the northern border and seemingly in Kenya Colony and the Uganda Protectorate, students of Bantu life should be on the alert for any discoverable facts that throw light upon the nature of ostensible tree-spirits that are worshipped.

Whatever doubt may remain with regard to these spirits, however, it is fairly certain that wherever sacredness attaches to a *grove* in Bantu Africa, some old celebrity was buried within its mysterious obscurity.

Livingstone, passing down the Zambezi between Zumbo and Tete, wrote in his journal: "On coming to some places, we were warned by the villagers not to cut the trees growing in certain spots, as they contained the graves of their ancestors."<sup>202</sup>

Junod, after maintaining that whatever sanctity attaches to particular trees is due to their association with ancestor-gods, and protesting that "he never met with any worship offered to a plant as such,"<sup>203</sup> goes on to say: "There are vast impenetrable thickets, in which the ancient chiefs have been buried, and they are consequently called *ntimu*, cemeteries. Every clan owns one or more of these burying places. The *ntimu* is reserved for the men of the royal family, those who have been the owners of the land. They are buried in different sections of the forest, 'according to their villages,' in such a way that the wood represents separate cemeteries, corresponding to the villages of the living. No woman, no uterine nephew is buried in official cemeteries. These woods are taboo. It is prohibited to gather fuel there, to cut any tree, or to allow the bush fire to enter them. . . . All entry is strictly prohibited except to the guardian of the wood, the priest, who is the descendant of the gods in the forest. He goes there from time to time to offer sacrifices. He penetrates into the dense foliage by a narrow path, hardly noticeable."<sup>204</sup> When Junod visited one of the most celebrated

<sup>202</sup> MTR. 602.

<sup>203</sup> LSAT. ii. 310.

<sup>204</sup> LSAT. ii. 351 *et seq.*



of these groves, he saw a low tumulus, with remains of offerings upon it, and found other graves at another spot; and he narrates a number of wonder-tales that are told about these woods.

Smith, after quoting Junod's statement<sup>205</sup> that what he took at first for a Nature-spirit proved on investigation to be an ancestor-spirit, adds: "The writer's own experience among the Baila was similar. They too stand in awe of mighty trees and speak with bated breath of some mighty spirit in them, but one always finds that the spirit was once a living man or woman."<sup>206</sup> He also helps us to understand how the Baila groves came into existence. "It is the general custom to plant a circle of sticks, chosen from trees that easily sprout, around the grave, so that in a few years there is a grove of trees to mark the place. These groves are called *mabwabwa*. Over the grave and within the circle of sticks, a small hut is erected. . . . It is at these temples that offerings and prayers are made to the ancestral spirits."<sup>207</sup> When speaking of the groves of the communal gods of the Baila, he makes a similar suggestion: "The origin of the groves may be the poles planted around the graves. In course of time they would grow into large trees, decay, and be replaced by younger ones growing up all around them. As it is taboo to meddle with the trees and the brushwood springing up under and around them, a dense impenetrable thicket is formed. Shim-unenga's grove at Mala covers at least an acre of ground."<sup>208</sup>

The Konde people of Lake Nyasa plant a cutting of *ndola* tree at the head and foot of a grave,<sup>209</sup> and "offer prayers in the sacred groves where their dead are buried."<sup>210</sup>

In Lake Tanganyika, an island called Kirindi, which was a peninsula when Cameron passed in 1874,<sup>211</sup> is regarded with such awe that Natives will not approach it. When the Rev. W. Griffiths managed to visit it by strategy, his Native attendants pointed out the place where the *mzimu* rested, but forbade him to go near it. He could see nothing but immense forest trees and a

<sup>205</sup> See p. 4f.

<sup>206</sup> RLR. 51.

<sup>207</sup> IPNR. ii. 120.

<sup>208</sup> IPNR. ii. 185.

<sup>209</sup> SRK. 294.

<sup>210</sup> NBCA. 63.

<sup>211</sup> *Across Africa*, i. 253f.

dense tangle of tropical creepers, but was told that the place owed its eerie reputation to a chief named Kirindi, whose grave is in that thicket.<sup>212</sup>

Sacred groves are found all over Africa, and always with the same significance. Dennett's interpretation of the many sacred groves in Loango<sup>213</sup> is too fanciful; but on a subsequent page<sup>214</sup> he quotes Bishop Johnson's statement in Yoruba Heathenism that Yorubas sometimes call sacred groves *igboro*, "groves sacred to the spirit of our ancestors," and also set apart individual trees for purposes of devotion; and in a recent article he himself puts forward a more meaningful suggestion. "Now when a father dies and is buried," he writes,<sup>215</sup> "a seed or a small plant is buried over the body in the grave. This grows and naturally becomes sacred. I cannot say that this is the nucleus of a sacred grove but it is certain that in every sacred grove there is always at least one sacred tree. Offerings, sometimes of blood but mostly of vegetable food-stuffs and cloth, are placed near the roots of this sacred tree." Talbot, too, gives facts in *Southern Nigeria* that point in the same direction. "Some Ibo towns, especially among the Ikwerri and Okoba, think that their dead live among the branches of the sacred trees near their compounds until the time comes for their reincarnation";<sup>216</sup> "nearly all Yoruba believe that souls about to be born live in or among trees, and it is for this reason that women so often pray to the tree spirit to send them children";<sup>217</sup> and many of the semi-Bantu tribes in Southern Nigeria believe that the dead inhabit the sacred trees near the compound pending reincarnation.<sup>218</sup> In 1868, at Bonny, the southernmost extension of Ibo territory, "Bishop Crowther and his son cut a road through the sacred grove, which was full of skulls, limbs, dead bodies, etc."<sup>219</sup> If sacred groves crown the burial-places of chiefs of bygone ages, one can understand why the priests of the Bavili groves of Nyambi and Senga are called upon to divine the cause of drought, a calamity usually attributed to

<sup>212</sup> *Chronicle of the London Missionary Society*, Dec. 1880.

<sup>213</sup> BBMM. 100-109.

<sup>214</sup> BBMM. 246.

<sup>215</sup> "West African Religion" in *Church Quarterly Review*, January 1921, p. 266.

<sup>216</sup> SN. ii. 270.

<sup>217</sup> SN. ii. 267.

<sup>218</sup> SN. ii. 270.

<sup>219</sup> SN. i. 270.

violation of the laws that the ancestors left and still vigilantly defend,<sup>220</sup> and why *nkici*-ism is connected with both sacred groves (*cibila*, pl. *bibila*) and the kingly office, as Dennett contends.<sup>221</sup>

#### EARTH-GODS

In astronomy, the personal equation of an observer is ascertained and allowed for; but in social anthropology, each observer peers into the gloom from his own little coign of vantage and tells the world what he partly sees and partly infers, and there is no known method of accurately assessing the allowance that ought to be made for his astigmatism or slowness in noting phenomena. Workers in this field are really purveyors of opinion, not of unclad truth—enlightened opinion, perhaps, but still opinion; and a man's opinions are unwittingly coloured by his prepossessions.<sup>222</sup>

Assertions that Bantu pay homage to Earth-gods are based upon scrappy and unconvincing evidence, mostly from tribes touched with Sudanic culture. Now the whole subject of Nature-worship in the Sudan still waits for some first-hand investigator who is neither hidebound from an unbalanced diet of Greek and Roman antiquities nor overawed by the imposing labels that theorists have affixed without previous analysis. It is a fine field of original research; but it lies, of course, beyond the confines of our present study. The Earth-gods of which Cardinall writes, for instance, are evidently errors of European interpretation rather than genuine Native personifications of Nature; and, though this is but a fragment of the larger question, it may save us from similar mistakes if we turn aside for a moment and winnow out his facts from his fancies.

He tells us that among Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, "the worship of ancestors is by far the most important cult for the individual, just as the worship of the Earth-gods is for the community."<sup>223</sup> Groups of real or putative kinsfolk dwell in separate compounds surrounded by farm lands

<sup>220</sup> BBMM. 68-70.

<sup>221</sup> BBMM. 96.

<sup>222</sup> See *my* p. 1.

<sup>223</sup> NTG. 45.

and patches of pasture.<sup>224</sup> Inside each compound a truncated pyramid<sup>225</sup> of clay, capped with a stone, stands for the founder's grave, and similar structures outside represent other deceased members of the family. Occasionally blood and feathers from sacrificed fowls are placed upon the cap-stones of these graves. But they are not all real graves: people think of the dead as intimately associated with the earth in which the corpse lies, and when a family moves to another locality, it puts earth from its old graves into new altars of the same shape at its new home and thenceforth offers its sacrifices there.<sup>226</sup>

So far, Cardinall outlines the kind of domestic ancestor-worship that is found all over Africa;<sup>227</sup> but in other parts of the continent, the fundamental features of the ancestor-worship of a family are reproduced in that of the larger community. It is believed that the discarnate spirit of the patriarch who first took possession of a district maintains unceasing watch over it, securing fertility for its people, flocks, herds, wild things, and gardens so long as he is honoured and obeyed; that each of his successors in turn becomes priest of his spirit as well as heir to his rights, duties, and titles; and that his burial-place is sacred ground.<sup>228</sup> Cardinall, however, unacquainted with the inwardness of ancestor-worship, jumps to the conclusion that his district gods of fertility are Nature-spirits, though everything that he tells us about them justifies the assumption that they are ancient chiefs whose bones lie in the sacred places (*tingani*), and whose spirits are served by the present heads of their several lines (*tindanas*).

Look at his facts, apart from his opinions. Turmoil played havoc with tribalism in the region of which he writes. Centuries ago the people lived in groups of no great size, each under its own civil and religious leader, whom they called *tindana*; but one by one the *tindanas* were stripped of their civil and military leadership, some by covetous and uncontrollable brothers and some by filibusters from abroad. Everybody knew, however,

<sup>224</sup> NTG. 15, 98-100.

<sup>225</sup> Although he calls them pyramids, they look like truncated cones in his pictures; NTG. 110-111.

<sup>226</sup> NTG. 20, 45, 71f., 105; cf. SB. 32, 69, 186, 268f., 333n.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. SB. 180, 182-202.

<sup>228</sup> See SB. 81, 179f., 202-265, 278, 333-36.

what a nasty way the gods have of handling people who invade their sanctuaries, and the veriest dare-devil that infested the country was not rash enough to usurp the priestly prerogatives of a *tindana*. Thus there came to be two kinds of chiefs in the country: *tindanas* who derive from old lines of chiefs that lost their secular rights and left their heirs little more than titles and priestly powers; and *nabas* who inherit what the spoilers of the *tindanas* seized.<sup>229</sup> *Tindanas* still assume office by virtue of their lineage.<sup>230</sup> They are lords of the land, as their predecessors were, though no longer lords of the people—caretakers of the land on behalf of their local deity, high priests, the only ones who know or are known to the spirit of the land, as he variously styles them.<sup>231</sup> They locate newcomers on their ancestral estate and introduce them to the divinity of the district. They appease their several gods with sacrifices after ancestral laws have been broken, and intervene as peacemakers to save the land from being polluted with blood. They fix the day when new crops may be eaten without offense.<sup>232</sup> They receive tithes from cultivators of the soil and offer them to their respective divinities.<sup>233</sup> And they adjudicated in cases of adultery and murder before the British came, being the only persons who could administer the sacramental potion of holy earth that gave validity to the prescriptive oath of compurgation.<sup>234</sup> All this marks them out as priests of their several dynasties, not of Nature-spirits.

So, also, with what he tells us about the gods themselves. There is not one god of the earth, he says, but a different god for each community,<sup>235</sup> each bearing a different name.<sup>236</sup> The fertility of a district depends upon the goodwill of its special divinity;<sup>237</sup> if the god is neglected or ancestral law violated, famine follows.<sup>238</sup> When a local divinity is exasperated, the only man who can pacify him is the *tindana* of the district—the man

<sup>229</sup> NTG. 15-17; cf. SB. 82, 227f., 336n.

<sup>230</sup> NTG. 25, cf. SB. 333-36.

<sup>231</sup> NTG. 16, 17, 60-61.

<sup>232</sup> NTG. 25f., 60; cf. SB. 81f., 96f., 212f., 218f., 247, 256f. 334, 385f.

<sup>233</sup> NTG. 25, 60; cf. SB. 251-55.

<sup>234</sup> NTG. 50, 55; cf. SB. 250.

<sup>235</sup> NTG. 16.

<sup>236</sup> NTG. 24.

<sup>237</sup> NTG. 65.

<sup>238</sup> NTG. 26.

who now holds the dynastic title and what the plunderers have left of the dynastic estate.<sup>239</sup> The gods reveal their will through the implements of divination,<sup>240</sup> and probably in other ways that Cardinall has not discovered. Anybody who makes a false statement after eating a pinch of earth from his own god's shrine incurs the anger of the divinity; but no one of these gods concerns himself with the perjury of outsiders.<sup>241</sup> The *tingani* or shrine of the local god is just what a chief's grave would become with the lapse of time—a grove, growing luxuriantly in ground that had been heavily manured for a generation or two by the primitive habits of villagers whose rubbish-heaps are still visible among the trees;<sup>242</sup> and it is not unlikely that the bones of an old notability whose name still clings to the grove are beneath the stone upon which the sacrifices are always offered.<sup>243</sup>

If we assume that these gods of fertility are discarnate chiefs who have been deified as spirit-lords of their several domains, every fact that Cardinall mentions falls easily into its place; but if we take them to be Nature-spirits, many of these facts become inexplicable.

It is easy to mistake a dynastic spirit for an Earth-god; but this explanation is hardly sufficient to cover some other phases of Sudanese and Bantu belief. There is a widespread belief in both regions that a divine being brought the first people and animals out of the earth through fissures in its surface, and that their footprints are still visible here and there upon the rocks. In the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, "the sections named Biung (a word of forgotten origin) nearly always lay claim to the fact that they themselves were from the earth and that their ancestors dwelt in holes in the ground."<sup>244</sup> So, too, "in many parts of Ashanti is to be found a tradition that the forbears of certain clans came forth out of a hole in the ground. There is a spot near Nkoranza and another at Wenki in North Ashanti, where large funnel-shaped holes are pointed out as being the spot where a particular clan's ancestors came forth in the

<sup>239</sup> NTG. 16, 62; cf. SB. 82, 179, 204, 214, 333-36.

<sup>240</sup> NTG. 26; cf. SB. 205, 256.

<sup>241</sup> NTG. 50; cf. NTG. 45 and SB. 76f., 269, 272, 333.

<sup>242</sup> NTG. 2, 25; cf. SB. 58, 224, 242, 255, 277, and my pp. 48, 50, 59, 61.

<sup>243</sup> NTG. 23, 25, 60, cf. 45.

<sup>244</sup> NTG. 13.

early dawn of the world. Holding as I do," continues Rattray,<sup>245</sup> "that the Ashanti are a people from the North and not indigenous inhabitants of the country they now occupy, I believe that they have adopted these myths from an indigenous people whom they met in the forests of their adopted country. Bosman, writing more than two hundred years ago, says, 'Having asked who were their ancestors . . . others on the Gold Coast would persuade us that the first men came out of holes and pits'."

Livingstone on his way back across the continent from Loanda (Angola), "made a detour to the south to visit the famous rocks of Pungo Andongo", for he had noticed rocks of the same kind soon after entering the district of Ambaca.<sup>246</sup> He described Pungo Andongo as a group of curious columnar-shaped rocks, each more than three hundred feet high, composed of shingle in a matrix of dark red sandstone. "They rest on a thick stratum of this last rock, with very few of the pebbles in its substance. On this a fossil palm has been found." "We were shown a footprint carved on one of these rocks," he adds. "It is spoken of as that of a famous queen who reigned over all this region."<sup>247</sup> He appears to have thought the footprint artificial, not accidental, and did not state whether it was where a person could conceivably have stood when the rock was soft,<sup>248</sup> nor whether other legends than that of the Jinga queen are locally connected with it.

In almost the same latitude, some fifteen degrees farther east, among the Alunda of the north-west corner of Northern Rhodesia, "it is said that the first man was created at the Katukang'onyi (a river in the Belgian Congo not far from Mwachiamvu's village site); *Nzambi* at this spot began the work of creation—making all animals, trees, etc. There can, it is said, be seen a human footprint in the rock, also the spoor of a dog and of a bush-pig, traces of man's early hunting activities."<sup>249</sup> And this writer goes to tell of the tradition that elders of the original community went forth from this place to found various tribes in Central Africa.

<sup>245</sup> AS. 121.

<sup>246</sup> MTR. 381. Pungo Andongo is about 200 miles from the mouth of the Kwanza River.

<sup>247</sup> MTR. 419-422.

<sup>248</sup> I have been told that it is so situated.

<sup>249</sup> WBA. 163-64.

The people round Blantyre (Nyasaland) told Macdonald that their forefathers sprang from a hole in a rock called *kapilimtiya* ('soft stone'); that this hole is in a desert place towards the north and was closed by *Mulungu*; and that round it are abundant footprints of all kinds of animals.<sup>250</sup> Miss Werner has a more recent and more interesting paragraph about these legends. "Mankind is held to have originated at Kapirimtiya, a hill—or as some say, an island in a lake, far to the west of Nyasa. Here it is believed that there is a rock covered with marks like the footprints of men and animals, and that, when men were first created, the island was a piece of soft mud, and Mulungu sent them across it, so as to leave their footmarks there, before they were dispersed over the world. One native account says that 'they came from heaven and fell down upon the earth'; another, that they came out of a hole in the rock, which was afterwards closed by 'the people of Mulungu', and is now 'in a desert place towards the north.' In the Bemba country, the Natives speak of two such places; and one of them was seen in 1902 by a European, who describes it in a letter to *Life and Work* as a 'conglomerate rock showing what the Natives call footprints of a man, a child, a zebra or horse, and a dog'. The Bantu people say that these footprints were made by Mulungu (or, as they call him, Luchereng'anga); 'and the people and animals he brought to occupy the country.' Offerings of beads, calico, and beer are placed on this rock. The writer thought the marks certainly looked like footprints, but were merely hollows where the rain had washed out the softer parts of the rock. The old headman of the place, naturally enough, would not hear of this explanation, and maintained that the marks had once been much plainer, but were now partly washed away by the rains. This account agrees well enough with the vague indications given by the Blantyre people as to the direction of Kapirimtiya."<sup>251</sup>

The Natives of Mushidi's country ascribe their origin to a 'Chief of all People' named Kara ya Rova, so Dr. Tilsley reports.<sup>252</sup> Kara ya Rova led his followers from the south towards

<sup>250</sup> A. i. 75, 279. See also an article by Dr. Hetherwick in JRAI. 1902, p. 468.

<sup>251</sup> NBGA. 70f.

<sup>252</sup> *Dani Crawford*, p. 127f.



the north, according to their legend, and in the Katanga country their ancestors dropped out of his caravan and settled down. "As he passed by the mountains of Kayumba, near the Lualaba," so runs Dr. Tilsley's account, "he left to them in the solid rock imprints of his feet for an everlasting memorial. There are, indeed, deep marks in the rocks which strongly resemble foot-marks of a great size. Mushidi seized on the idea of this, which was the only record of real permanence known to him; and, accordingly, went solemnly to the mountains of Kayumba and caused the pattern of his feet to be marked out in the rocks as he stood upon them, for all the world as though he were being measured for a pair of sandals. His cunning workmen then chiselled out the shape of them, leaving as he trusted, a memorial to all times of the greatness and godhead of Mushidi. Thus did he mark, or desired to mark, his standing as a peer of the Originator of the Race." Dr. Tilsley unfortunately omits to state whether he is describing the footprints of the Originator of the Race from hearsay or from personal observation, whether they are in rock that could conceivably be trodden on when it was impressionable enough to take a footprint, and whether Mushidi's workmen were cunning enough to carve sham footprints that could be mistaken for real ones.

Hobley mentions an Akamba belief that "footprints of spirits (*Aïmu*) are sometimes found imprinted on rock; there are some said to be seen to this day on a hill at Kataani near the river Mukungu."<sup>253</sup>

Smith & Dale heard a similar story among the Baila.<sup>254</sup> "On the shore of a lagoon of the Kafue River, at the Government Station of Namwala, there is a bank of rock upon which these literalists say the ancients descended, and in proof, they point to the innumerable pits in the weather-worn sandstone. What are these but the footprints of the ancestors, impressed on the rock at the moment of the first contact with the earth? The rock is named Bwenga-Leza."

"The Bawenda [of the Zoutpansberg] have a dim idea of a Creator of the world, called Kosane, who, according to their saying, left his footprint on a rock near the Levuvu River, in

<sup>253</sup> AK. 92.

<sup>254</sup> IPNR. i. 20f.

Lambane's country, when he went away and committed the ruling of the world into the hands of Ralowimba, the rewarder of good and punisher of evil."<sup>255</sup>

The Swazis, whose country is four or five degrees south of the Zoutpansberg, told Kidd<sup>256</sup> "that they knew of some marks of one-legged angels on the rocks in the mountains near the king's kraal, but that they disliked showing them to strangers."

When Livingstone was discussing the geological changes caused by the rent through which the Zambesi flows at the Victoria Falls, he remarked that the Natives had no tradition of an earthquake, though they had other traditions. "They have a tradition," says he,<sup>257</sup> "that they came out of a cave called 'Loey' in company with the beasts, and all point in one direction, viz. N. N. E. Loey, too is an exception in the language, as they use masculine instead of neuter pronouns to it." What Livingstone noticed as a grammatical peculiarity is really the usual practice of these people in cases where the name of a person has been bestowed upon a place and still continues to overshadow it.

The Makololo were evidently pointing to the Kafue or to the Bemba country mentioned above; but there are a number of places in the south that are called by the same name and linked with the same tradition, and the most famous of them is within thirty miles of Livingstone's old home at Kolobeng. Natives describe them all as 'caves'<sup>258</sup> from which men and animals first came out upon the earth, leaving footprints in the solid rock; and in the legends attached to them the names of *Loowe* (as I should write it), *Tintibane*, *Matsieñ*, and *Thobéga* are mingled in inextricable confusion.<sup>259</sup> A trader at Kanye told me of one such *Loowe* just south of the pass through which the road runs upon leaving Kanye for Mafeking. Many Natives told me of another near Kopong, on the road from Molepolole to Selenye. I heard of another near Setlagoli; and one of my colleagues saw another a day or two west of Morokweng. But

<sup>255</sup> Gottschling in R. BAAS, 1905, iii., p. 211.

<sup>256</sup> EK. 108.

<sup>257</sup> MTR. 528.

<sup>258</sup> The Becwana use the word *logaga* to describe a cave, a fissure or hole in rock, or even an overhanging cliff that might be used as a rock-shelter.

<sup>259</sup> Cf. my p. 39f.

the *Loowe* of which I heard oftenest is about a mile to the west of Pilane Siding on the Bechuanaland Railway. I had long wanted to visit this place, and in December 1916 Mr. Booth Vickerman of Mochudi was good enough to send me out in his car.

I wish I were a geologist, but I am not. Many hills in the Bechuanaland Protectorate are capped with sandstone conglomerate like that described by Livingstone at Pungo Andongo; but there are also patches of homogeneous sandstone at the country level that seem to have been deposited in still water. *Loowe* is one of these. There is no cave there; but there is a vertical pit in the sandstone that looks for all the world like the water-holes that Natives still dig in hard ground. It contained water at the time of my visit; rainwater, they said, not spring water. A boy who was herding cattle near by showed me where his head came on the wall of the pit when he stood in the bottom to draw water for his stock; and if he was right, the pit must be about seven feet deep, and the water at that time perhaps three feet. The sandstone in which this pit lies is plentifully sprinkled with footprints of people and animals that look as if they were unintentionally made when the rock was plastic. I saw the footprint of a lion on the lip of the hole, and footprints of dogs or jackals here and there upon the rock. I was told that other animals had left their spoor, but I saw no others, though they may be there. I saw what I took to be footprints of men, women, and youths, and noticed that they were more numerous in close proximity to the water-hole. There was nothing peculiar about these footprints, so far as I could see, except that the big toes were not quite so much larger than the others as the print of a Mocwana foot would show. What I wanted most to see was the footprint of *Loowe* himself; and they showed me the print of a right foot, wider than others on this rock and perhaps a little longer, that looks as if it had six toes. When the Akamba of Kenya Colony were asked how they knew that the footprints leading into the Kapia cave were those of the man who died the day before,<sup>259a</sup> they declared that a man with six fingers and six toes had died in that vicinity and that next morning each foot-

<sup>259a</sup> See my pp. 43, 147.

print leading into the cave was that of a six-toed man.<sup>259b</sup> But I doubt whether the man who left the print that I saw had more than five toes. He seems to have stood for a while on his right foot (or perhaps the print of the left has weathered away) as if intently watching something, and then to have shifted his position so slightly that his big toe happened to rest in the print of the next, giving extra width to the footprint and the appearance of six toes. It is this single footprint standing apart from the rest that has given rise to the legend, known to every Native in Bechuanaland, that *Loowe* was a one-legged god.

The sacred footprints of the goddess Sita in the little temple near Monghyr on the Ganges, the two footprints of Vishnu near the famous well of Marnikarnika Kund in Benares, the two footprints of Buddha in the little temple of Buddha Gya, and the footprint of Vishnu (sixteen inches long) in the temple of Vishnu-pad some five miles away, are all thought to be the work of men's hands. Fossil footprints of birds and beasts are, however, found in many parts of the world, and the marks in the *Loowe* sandstone look to me like real human footprints.

Within the last twenty years remarkable human remains have come to light in the southern third of Africa. Parts of an ancient skull found at Boskop in the Transvaal in 1913 were assigned by scientists to a genus that they called *Homo capensis*, and regarded as possibly akin to the Cro-Magnon race. The Oldoway skeleton, discovered in German East Africa in 1914, has been assigned to the Pleistocene Period, and many skeletons of a closely related type have been found in Pleistocene deposits in Kenya Colony by the recent East African Archaeological Expedition. Human remains found in the cave at Broken Hill in 1921 were unfortunately without geological setting; but Elliot Smith, who is a biologist of international reputation, found anatomical reasons for believing "that the Rhodesian species was the most primitive member of the genus *Homo* at present known", and that this species may possibly have "lived on in South Africa, free from human competition, until the Boskop race, or the ancestors of the Bushman, made their way down the dark continent."<sup>260</sup> W. P. Pycraft, writing four years later

<sup>259b</sup> AK. 88.

<sup>260</sup> *The Evolution of Man: Essays*. By G. Elliot Smith, M. A., M. D., Litt. D., D.

than Smith<sup>261</sup> and claiming to have made a more intensive study of these remains, attributed them to a man who was not of our genus, and proposed to give him a genus all to himself, which he wanted to call *Scyphanthropos* ('Stooping-man') to distinguish it from *Eoanthropos* ('Dawn-man') and *Pithecanthropos* ('Ape-man') on the one hand and *Homo* on the other. Petroglyphs found lately in the Western Transvaal and lodged in the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria, have been assigned by experts to Palaeolithic artists. In the year 1928, on the Springbok Flats in the Bushveld north of Pretoria, road-makers, digging calcareous tufa for ballast, came upon the skull and bones of an ancient man and found the remains of a gigantic extinct buffalo (*Bubalis bainii*) and two primitive antelopes lying in the same plane from six to ten yards away. Experts from the Transvaal Museum came to the spot without delay, and asked Dr. Robert Broom, who was making studies for his monograph on fossil reptiles of the Karroo, to prepare an account of the discovery. Springbok Man was ascribed by Dr. Broom to the mid-Palaeolithic Period and by Mr. Lang (Transvaal Museum) to the later Palaeolithic Period; and Sir Arthur Keith thought Mr. Lang came nearer the truth when he assigned him to "a later culture—the Capsian culture—the contemporary in Africa of the Aurignacian in Europe."<sup>262</sup> Now the *Loowe* that we are considering is only some two hundred miles west of the Springbok Flats, and less than that north of the district in which the artistic petroglyphs were found. I wonder whether these patches of sandstone were impressionable when people of some of these ancient breeds were on the prowl.

Tylor wrote (in 1878) long before anything was known of these ancient remains, and neither he nor the traveller upon whom he relied had ever seen the footprints in question: but his suggestion must not be ignored. "The North American Indian," he says,<sup>263</sup> "whose attention is specially alive to the footprints of men and animals, very often carve them on rock, sometimes with figures to which they belong. These footprints

Sc., F. R. C. P., F. R. S. pp. 76 and 82. No student of the history of mankind can afford to overlook these essays.

<sup>261</sup> *Illustrated London News*, Sept. 8, 1928.

<sup>262</sup> *Illustrated London News*, March 16, 1929.

<sup>263</sup> EHM. 116.

are sometimes so naturally done as to be mistaken for real ones. The rock of which Anderson heard in South Africa, 'in which the tracks of all the animals indigenous to the country are distinctly visible', is probably such a sculptured rock." Now Bantu, like Amer-Indians, are "specially alive to the footprints of men and animals", some professing to recognize the spoor of each animal in their herd, and Bushmen are probably the most expert trackers in the world. It is one thing, however, to have an eye for art and quite another to be an artist. In Bushman paintings people are represented by a few strokes, like those that children make on their slates, and animals, though alive and kicking, are out of proportion and almost destitute of perspective. Scattered over the veld between Barkly West and Mafeking, there are a number of so-called rock-engravings that are usually attributed to one breed of Bushman that formerly roamed over this country; those that I have seen are dotted outline sketches of animals that could have been made by smart blows of a stone-age tool along a chalked line, much rougher work than the paintings, but like them all on the flat. The much more artistic petroglyphs mentioned above have been called bas-reliefs; but the pictures of them that have been published show no attempt at working in the round. Bantu tribesmen here and there like to carve people and animals in wood, or occasionally in ivory; but the people are grotesque and the animals unnatural. To credit Bantu, Bushmen, or earlier dwellers in these regions with skill enough to sculpture footprints that could be mistaken for real ones is to flout fidelity to known facts and surrender unconditionally to imagination. The builders of ancient towns and temples in Southern Rhodesia may have come so far south—we do not know; but even if they did, no sculptured footprints are found near their known abodes in the north and the few soapstone birds and crocodiles that they left behind them are very far from lifelike. Who then could have sculptured these footprints? We are driven, I think, to one of two conclusions: the *Loowe* marks are either fossil footprints of mankind,<sup>264</sup> or mere pits due to the natural weathering of the

<sup>264</sup> If they are, it is wicked to let them be worn away by the feet of cattle. Segale, Chief Linchwe's brother, who accompanied me from Mochudi, said they were much plainer when he was young.

rock; and of these alternatives, the latter makes the heavier demand upon credulity.

The legends that cluster round this place are built upon a myth that is applied indiscriminately to each of the five patches of footprints mentioned above,<sup>265</sup> although it owes some of its details to one of them and some to another. In this myth *Loowe* is always the principal figure. It was here, so runs the story, that *Loowe* emerged from the underworld, bringing people and animals to stock the earth. His footprint is different from the rest, for he had but one leg, and his is the only one that points back to the cave—proof enough, surely, that he returned whence he came and left his people and animals to multiply and replenish the earth. It is said, however, that his people returned to him after death, and that their descendants do the same to this day.

*Loowe*, *Tintibane*, *Matsien*, and *Thobéga* are all associated with these caves and footprints, and the myths that have been spun round them are inextricably intertwined, as I said before.<sup>266</sup> Like founders of Bantu colonies, they are gods of fertility and of vigor, worshipped with white oxen in time of drought and black ones in time of war, and so closely related to one another that the praise-name of one may be conferred upon another without offence.<sup>267</sup> *Thobéga* has received enough attention in these pages.<sup>268</sup> *Matsien* has lost his individuality with the lapse of ages; his name is akin to that of *Matsiakwana*,<sup>269</sup> but nobody knows whether the two gods had anything to do with one another. *Tintibane*, like some of the rest, was never seen; but odd individuals who had a sense that others lacked<sup>270</sup> sometimes caught the sound of his voice coming from a cave or a pool of water. Some people say that he was the son of *Thobéga*; but the common opinion is that he was the man whom *Loowe* brought forth from the underworld and left in charge of the colony that he established and that *Thobéga* was his son. *Tintibane* is a great name to swear by. *Ka Tintibane!* ('By Tinti-

<sup>265</sup> See p. 69f.

<sup>266</sup> See p. 69f.

<sup>267</sup> See p. 40.

<sup>268</sup> See p. 38ff.

<sup>269</sup> See p. 35.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. SB. 104.

bane!') is a blasphemous expletive; but to utter the same phrase while holding up the right hand, its forefinger wet with the speaker's saliva, is tantamount to kissing the Book. Turbulent talkers, and men who pawn their souls to provide credit for their speech, rap out bolder forms of the same oath: *Ka Tintibane phogwana ea n̄wana a modimol* ('By Tintibane, scalp of the son of god!') or *Ka phogwana ea Tintibane, n̄wana a modimol* ('By the scalp of Tintibane, son of god!'); and since the amplitude of an oath adds greatly to its impressiveness, recourse is had to a still more elaborate formula upon solemn occasions. One variant<sup>271</sup> runs: *Kea ikana ka Tintibane, n̄wana a lehatshe; ka thiba ka lehatshe, ka leléméla segwanyana se se kwa goo Moseki*. Literal translations of archaic utterances are usually deceptive; and the feeling of this oath, if I have caught it correctly, may be better conveyed in a freer rendering: "I swear by *Tintibane*, son of the soil; I repel [the charge, attack, evidence?] by means of the soil, humbly approaching the little calabash that is at *Moseki's* place." *Moseki* ('a litigant') is thought to be the name of some old chief, though it does not occur in the traditional genealogy of any ruling family that has held sway in Bechuanaland since the beginning of the nineteenth century; and 'the little calabash' may be a plant-totem,<sup>272</sup> a poison-cup, or the container of some sacred substance,<sup>273</sup> for aught the Natives know. *Loowe* is known beyond the borders of Bechuanaland. "Luwe", according to the Baila of the Kafue plains,<sup>274</sup> "is a one-legged goblin who rides about the forest mounted on an eland. He prevents people from killing game but is himself a great hunter. They say the antelopes are his cattle." Among Yaos (Wayao or Ajawa) of the Shire Highlands, "Chitowe (or *Siluwí*) . . . figures in fairy tales as a kind of monstrous being, with only one arm, one leg, one eye, etc., the rest of his body being made of wax. 'He is associated with famine . . . He is invoked by the women, on the day of initiating their fields . . . when the new crop has begun to grow.' Chitowe may become a child or a young woman. In this dis-

<sup>271</sup>See SB. 250.

<sup>272</sup>Cf. SB. 229f., 249f.

<sup>273</sup>Cf. SB. 176, 221, 239f., 269, 329, and my p. 64.

<sup>274</sup>IPNR. ii. 131.



guise he visits villages and tells whether the coming year will bring food or famine. He receives their hospitality, but throws the food over his shoulder without eating it. Chitowe is a child or subject of Mtanga, and some speak of several Chitowe who are messengers of Mtanga. The Nyanja boggy, Chiruwi, is probably the same as Chitowe; he is constructed as above described, and, in addition, carries an axe. He is in the habit of meeting travellers and wrestling with them in lonely places; if the traveller falls, 'he returns no more to his village—he dies'.<sup>276</sup> Loey, Loowe, Luwe, Siluwi, Chitowe, Chiruwi seem to be variants of some old Bantu root-word.<sup>277</sup> Rowley quotes<sup>278</sup> Arbousset as saying that the Barolong (Orange Free State) "regard God as a beautiful person, having only one leg, emblematic of unity) and thoroughly just and beneficent." Arbousset's Barolong undoubtedly had the god *Loowe* in mind, for they lived in the *Loowe* country about a century ago. Their suggestion that one-leggedness is emblematic of unity has not the slightest touch of fun in it. One of my Becwana friends told me very seriously that when his heathen fathers spoke of a one-legged god they really meant "the One God"; and another explained that it was their way of describing "the God that never changed his position in the work that he wrought for men." Such notions rather nauseate people who have been brought up on a plain diet, but Becwana relish them; and, after all, the inclination to allegorize myths that are too sacred to scrap and too uncouth to live with is essentially human, however readily it runs to travesty among the simple.

To my mind, *Loowe* and *Tintibane*, like other cave-gods of Bechuanaland,<sup>279</sup> must be classed with deified chiefs who still

<sup>276</sup> NBGA. 59.

<sup>277</sup> It would be interesting to discover the relation between this old root-word and the -roba, -uwa group of Johnson's root-words for 'God' (CSBSL. ii. 308), his -roi group for 'Witch' (CSBSL. ii. 416), his -oya group for 'Spirit' (CSBSL. ii. 387), and his -loyi group for 'Magic' (CSBSL. ii. 340). To Johnston, his helpers in the field, and the Natives that they had to rely upon, such a word as 'arrow', 'be', 'finger', 'fire', 'lion', 'rain', or 'star' means the same thing; but they do not all mean the same thing when they use such a word as 'God', 'ghost', 'Devil', 'doctor', 'magic', 'spirit', or 'witch', or even such a word as 'brother', 'father', 'mother' or 'wife'.

<sup>278</sup> RA. 24.

<sup>279</sup> See pp. 35-42.

rule men from their subterranean abode, not with Nature-spirits. Most, if not all, of them probably lived and died in the country before the ancestors of its present inhabitants arrived; and I am inclined to think that *Loowe* was the first comer, that *Tintibane* was his son or successor, and that *Tintibane's* distinctive appellation, *ñwana a lehatshe* ('son of the soil') means that he was the first chief of his line to be born in the new country. Brown records a legend that portrays *Loowe* as the discoverer, not the producer, of the footprints.<sup>280</sup> His narrative is too long for our pages, but its drift may be indicated in a few lines. *Loowe*, hunting one day with his dogs, happened upon marks of human feet that sorely perplexed him. He could not sleep for longing to see the two-legged creatures that had left their tracks in the rock, and at dawn he sallied forth to find them. But he sought in vain. He killed an antelope, but eating was as difficult as sleeping, and he hung the venison in a tree, hoping to lure them to his dwelling. Meanwhile the women (for here the legend lifts the veil) had traced his spoor to his cave; but he, poor man, unaware that they were on his trail, called upon the beasts of the field, in his intolerable longing, to aid him in his quest. Some of his four-footed friends sought them diligently, and told him at last in a little song (as animals usually do in Bantu folk-yarns) that the bipeds had been found. So, following their trail, he came upon them at their play, and found it was good to be where they were. And God in his compassion commanded them to marry.

One word more before we pass to another topic. Stories like these that have gathered round *Loowe* and *Tintibane* ought not to be described as anthropogenic myths; for they are speculations about the origin of a tribal group, not of mankind. Nor can they be called legends of creation; for they assume that the progenitors of the community lived in caves, or in an underground world that is reached through caves, or (as some tales tell) in the reeds before their divine patriarch led them forth full-grown, with their wives, children, domestic animals, and wild things of the chase. I doubt whether the Bantu have ever bestowed thought upon the origin of mankind, or even conceived of such an entity as mankind or of a time when there were no people in the world.

<sup>280</sup> ABN. 164.

## SKY-GODS

Something has been said on preceding pages of a sky-home for the soul,<sup>281</sup> and of the good offices of discarnate chiefs in obtaining rain for their tribal lands;<sup>282</sup> and in our next volume we shall have to consider the relation of some Bantu high gods to the sky. But whether sun, moon, stars, or other celestial phenomena are worshipped by Bantu tribesmen is a separate question that ought to be frankly faced.

Sir Harry Johnston wrote that "the negroes of Congoland (as elsewhere in Africa) take surprisingly little notice of *the heavenly bodies or phenomena of the skies*,"<sup>283</sup> and that "little interest or superstition appears to be attached to" sun and moon.<sup>284</sup> Keith says of the Alunda: "I can find no belief in occult influences of the sun or moon or stars";<sup>285</sup> and Melland affirms that the Bakaonde do not worship natural objects like the sun.<sup>286</sup> It is true, I think, that the Bantu do not worship the heavenly bodies; but it would be passing strange if they did not credit them, like everything under the heavens, with occult properties that astute magicians can use for their own ends.

## THE SUN

The Becwana have a mysterious method of ensuring good luck when they are out in the wilds. A hunter stands by the fire at his bivouac with a wisp of dry grass in his left hand and a switch in his right, his dogs meanwhile eating a bit of meat on either side of him; and when the first rays of the rising sun shoot over the horizon, he lights the wisp of grass at the fire and cries as he pushes the flame towards the sun, "*Letsatsi ke yoo o many-ama!*" ("There's the lucky sun!"), driving his dogs backward at the same moment with smart blows from his switch. For a long time I was under the impression that this practice was peculiar to hunters, and thought it might possibly have some connection with the Dioscuri, who were patrons of hunters; and

<sup>281</sup> SB. 60-68.

<sup>282</sup> SB. 74, 203-219, 251ff., 275, 354, 376.

<sup>283</sup> GGC. 815.

<sup>284</sup> GGC. 635.

<sup>285</sup> WBA. 163.

<sup>286</sup> WBA. 154.

when I discovered that men out in search of stray cattle or on other pursuits bespoke good luck in the same manner, I wondered whether it might be a relic of sun-worship;<sup>287</sup> but all the tribesmen that I consulted declared with one accord that it had nothing to do with the morning star, nor with the sun, except that the orb of day is the world's chronometer and marks a propitious time for approach to the spirits of the mighty dead.

When a libation of beer is poured by the side of a medicine-man's grave in Ukamba of Kitui, it is essential that it should be done *before* sunrise.<sup>288</sup> In Kikuyu, "the proper time for a communal sacrifice to Engai is about two P. M., but private sacrifices take place at nine A. M."; sacrifices to ancestor-spirits are usually held at the latter hour, but the quarterly sacrifice that an elder offers at his father's grave "must take place before sunrise."<sup>289</sup> After mentioning that the choice of early morning as the time for sacrifice (a common feature of ancient beliefs<sup>290</sup>) has been thought to be connected with the worship of Venus, the morning star, Hobley suggests<sup>291</sup> that it is more likely to have sprung from the notion that discarnate spirits are afoot at night and lapse into inaction at sunrise.<sup>292</sup> He is on the right track, I think. The Bantu certainly do not relate it to the worship of celestial objects; nor do they regard the early morning, whether sunrise or before, as the *only* time for sacrifice and offering. Some tribes slay the victim in the evening, leave the flesh all night where home-coming spirits are likely to find it, and complete the sacrificial rites in the morning—an indication that spirits are abroad at night and wend their way home to the infernal regions when the night is done. If sacrifices to ancestors have failed to benefit a sick man of the Chaga tribes and a pregnant cow is therefore offered to Ruwa, this victim is placed in the sick man's hut during the day and sacrificed outside the hut *at midnight*.<sup>293</sup>

<sup>287</sup> Cf. SB. 259.

<sup>288</sup> BBM. 101.

<sup>289</sup> BBM. 43, 51.

<sup>290</sup> Cf. Job. i. 5.

<sup>291</sup> BBM. 51.

<sup>292</sup> The tendency of ghosts to disappear at dawn may be allied to the notion that our night is the day of the nether regions (See SB. 64), and that ghosts, like tribesmen, make for home when their day is far spent; but the explanation that Bakongo are said to give of their evening burial customs (See SB. 62) is out of harmony with this bit of cosmography.

<sup>293</sup> K. 180.

When Livingstone asked his chief boatman, at the confluence of the Leebea and Leeambye, whether a halo round the moon betokened rain, he replied: "O no; It is the Barimo (gods or departed spirits) who have called a picho; don't you see they have the Lord (sun) in the centre?"<sup>294</sup> *Kgwedi e epile picó* ('the moon has convoked an assembly') is a common Secwana expression for 'there is a halo round the moon'; and I think (I am not sure) that I have heard them use a similar expression when there was a halo round the sun. To them it is a natural metaphor. A Tribal Assembly gathers in a great circle round the paramount chief who has convoked it, and the idiom, upon the face of it, likens the moon (or the sun) to a great thief and the halo to his tribe around him. Natives occasionally told me that God had convoked an Assembly of spirits round the moon. I always assumed that the statement was born of a misinterpretation of their own appropriate metaphor and a desire to Christianize it for my benefit; for none of them could ever explain why spirits dwelling in the underworld should hold their Assemblies in the skies, or why either of the great luminaries should be called their chief, and all denied that their people had ever worshipped the sun or moon, or even heard of such worship. I rather expected to be told that these great luminaries spend half their time in the underworld;<sup>297</sup> but even this explanation was never forthcoming. It would be interesting to discover whether the idea that Livingstone's boatman entertained has been met with in other tribes, or whether it is a remnant of foreign culture that has somehow found its way up the Zambesi—possibly from the West Coast, or from the Zimbabwe civilization, or from Bushman or Hottentot mythology.<sup>295</sup>

The Bangala say that the sun is the lover of the moon and continually pursues her across the sky; and that when, upon rare occasions, he catches her, there is an eclipse.<sup>296</sup>

Dugald Campbell asserts<sup>298</sup> that in the Katanga province of the Belgian Congo, the west has always been associated with darkness, death, misery, and misfortune, the West Coast being

<sup>294</sup> MTR. 220.

<sup>295</sup> See, also, SB. 3n.

<sup>296</sup> GGC. 815.

<sup>297</sup> See SB. 63f.

<sup>298</sup> IHB. 17.

known as Mbonshi or 'dead-man's-land'; and that Kabanga, 'the east', suggests the beginning and origin of things, the source of life, light, and fertility. But his fanciful linking of these ideas to the West Coast slave trade and the local orientation of the dead, as well as his derivation of *mbonshi* from a root which he says means 'Hell' (that is, evidently, 'abode of condemned spirits'), causes one to wish that someone who is not fascinated by the extravagances of the 'long-grass school of impressionists' would tell us, dispassionately, what facts lie behind these assertions.

THE MOON<sup>291</sup>

The moon is the tribesman's calendar and the orb of night. While the sun is revealing the beauty of the landscape, it smites the beholder with its brilliance; but as the silver-footed queen marches serenely across the lustrous sky of an African night, she caresses old and young, hints at a thousand lovelinesses behind her veil, and summons every villager to the frolic and the dance. It would be passing strange if the moon did not figure in the lore of the people.

The Zulus say that when the moon has been eaten by the days, it is taken by the sun, and goes with the sun for a few days and then leaves it and appears when the sun sets. A man standing in deep shade can sometimes see the stars in the sky by day and the moon close by the sun, whereby they know that the moon is not dead; but they call it a new moon when it appears in the west as twilight begins, and they say it is full when it rises in the east as the sun sets.<sup>299</sup>

Ellenberger mentions a feast held by the Basuto on the appearance of the new moon,<sup>300</sup> at which the strictest propriety was observed, even solemnity. "Married people slept apart; no one went to the fields; the cattle remained in the kraals till midday, and were made to run when they were let out. All the milk of that day, instead of being poured into skin bags to thicken, as usual, was used to make a kind of milk porridge (*Mahala*). The young were not allowed to approach the food for the morrow's feast, otherwise they might become infirm, and afterwards

<sup>299</sup> RSZ. 395-400.

<sup>300</sup> HB. 49-51.

<sup>301</sup> See also SB. 61, 62, 63.

beget children with sore eyes or squints." He is of opinion that these lunar feasts were originally religious and that the Shades had their place in them, but wonders whether they are related to Egypt, where the Word-God (Thoth) was represented with a crescent on his head.

When the moon appears just a little at sunset, the Becwana *roga kgwedi*. This is a peculiar phrase. *Kgwedi* is their word for 'moon', and *go roga* is 'to curse'; but, unlike *go hutsa*, which means 'to consign to perdition', *go roga* has the special sense of cursing a person either by pointing to the pudenda or dishonoring them with names that are still decent when used of cattle but obscene when applied to people. My endeavors to subject this phrase to examination were always foiled with the assurance that the moon is connected with menstruation; which looks like a lame attempt to explain a term that has lost its original meaning. Be that as it may, the Becwana *roga kgwedi* by hailing the moon with a shout upon its first appearance in the west, pointing at it with their fingers,<sup>302</sup> throwing things at it, and crying, 'Come thou to me with riches!' or 'Bring me cattle!' or a wife, or a child, or whatever else is craved for. Now in all this they are as unconscious of worship as are our own rustics who turn their money over and wish for something as they catch their first glimpse of the new moon over their right shoulders, though such customs, like that of the Breton girls who pray the new moon to grant them dreams of their future husbands,<sup>303</sup> are probably survivals from some forgotten cult. The day after the new moon is, however, a sabbath. If a person cultivates his land on that day, his crops will not ripen. But that is the medicine-man's busy day—the day when his careful clients fumigate their sheep (and sometimes cattle) with *leshwalo*, and place *dipheku* at the gates of their town to turn aside sickness. *Rra-Tlhaku* ('Daddy Bushes'), the Man in the Moon, is a well-known character in Becwanaland: he was an impious fellow whom the moon seized for mending his bush-fences on one of her sabbaths; and when the moon is full and he becomes conspicuous, he is held up as a warning to youngsters who lack becoming respect for the customs of their fathers.

<sup>302</sup> See p. 144.

<sup>303</sup> RAC. 178.

The Becwana believe also that 'possessed people'—lunatics, as we call them—grow worse as the moon grows and find an interval of sanity when the moon is in its dark quarter; that young children may become blind if they are shown the moon; and that careless folk who sleep with their faces upturned to its light, especially when it is (*kolobarale*) full, are likely to be stricken with moon-blindness. And here I may remark that I had men in my caravan between Zanzibar and Tanganyika who could see as well as others by day, but had to be led by the hand when the moon was bright.

While Livingstone was living with the Becwana he had somehow failed to notice the custom described on the preceding page, and when he saw it among the Makololo of Shesheke on the Zambesi, he wrote:<sup>304</sup> "A curious custom, not to be found among the Bechuanas, prevails among the black tribes beyond them. They watch most eagerly for the first glimpse of the new moon, and, when they perceive the faint outline after the sun has set deep in the west, they utter a loud shout of 'Kua!' and vociferate prayers to it. My men, for instance, called out, 'Let our journey with the white man be prosperous! Let our enemies perish, and the children of Nake become rich! May we have plenty of meat on this journey!' &c. &c."

When the new moon is first descried by the Baila, "a person takes a piece of charcoal in his hand, waves it round his head, and throws it towards the west. This is to remove the ill-luck from himself. In its early days the moon is *tonda*: the ill-luck attached to it has not yet been thrown away. When six days have passed, and it has reached its first quarter, the ill-luck has gone, and the people dance for joy."<sup>305</sup>

On the lower Congo, according to Claridge,<sup>306</sup> "sickness accompanies a waning moon. A new moon takes away disease."

Battell stated that when he was in Angola (A. D. 1590-1606) it was customary for the women to turn up their buttocks<sup>307</sup>

<sup>304</sup> MTR. 235. '*Kua!*' means 'There!' and 'Nake' ('doctor') was the name by which Livingstone was usually known to the Natives.

<sup>305</sup> IPNR. II. 219.

<sup>306</sup> WBT. 305.

<sup>307</sup> "A person curses an adult relative in the following manner," says Weeks, writing of the north bend of the Congo: "he rubs his thighs, bends down, and



to the new moon when they caught the first glimpse of it, because they ascribed their menstruous courses to it.<sup>308</sup> And Father Merolla wrote that when he was in Loango (some time after 1682), "at the appearance of every new moon these people fall on their knees, or else cry out standing and clapping their hands, *So may I renew my life as thou art renewed.*"<sup>309</sup>

In Bunyoro, "the period of the waxing moon was the most propitious time, and everything beginning then would prosper. A child born with the new moon would grow and be healthy and fortunate, whereas one born when the moon was waning was regarded with misgiving and sorrow. So if a marriage was to be prosperous it had to take place when the moon was new, for it would receive additional blessing from that luminary. Peasants sowed their seeds and baked their pots, and smiths preferred to do any important work, in the time of the new moon, because anything done then increased and was strong, but the propitious time passed with the waning of the full moon."<sup>310</sup> "To the African in general," says the same writer,<sup>311</sup> "the new moon is always a time for rejoicing; it is watched for and hailed with songs of festivity. It is the waxing moon that brings luck, and the period between the new and full moon is the lucky time for events of importance, such as marriages and births."<sup>312</sup>

In Buganda and in Busoga it was customary for a mother to show her babe the first new moon that appeared after its birth, so that the child might grow healthy and strong.<sup>313</sup> And at every new moon, the Kimbugwe or officer in charge of the temple of the king's umbilical cord, which stood hard by the royal enclosure in Buganda, had to bring the cord to the king for inspection, after which it was wrapped up again and placed in the doorway of the temple for the moon to shine upon it.<sup>314</sup>

From such scanty information, it is hard to draw safe con-

turns his back towards the one to be cursed and shouts: 'Be accursed.' This is also done in the face of an enemy as an insolent curse on them." ACC. 299.

<sup>308</sup> SAAB. 74.

<sup>309</sup> C. i. 583. See also SB. 3n.

<sup>310</sup> SCA. 212-13 and cf. RAC. 176-77 for similar Celtic notions.

<sup>311</sup> SCA. 62.

<sup>312</sup> For worldwide notions about the influence of the moon on growth and vigour, see GB. Pt. IV., vol. ii. 132-150.

<sup>313</sup> Bg. 58, GS. 108, 124.

<sup>314</sup> Bg. 236.

clusions: but it would appear that, although the Bantu attribute occult influence to the moon and rejoice in its light, they do not regard it as worshipful. A complete revolution of the moon round the earth provides them with a natural and convenient measure of time, intermediate between a day and a year, for the observance of many social functions, worship among the rest; but lunar feasts and sabbaths derive their sanctity from the gods, not from the moon. Le Roy's finding on this question is probably beyond reproach: "The appearance of the moon, its contrast with the sun, its changes, its mildness and brightness, the faithfulness with which it measures time, the sort of serene kindness with which it presides for whole nights over his dances and feasts at the sound of the tam-tam, the chance it gives a traveler to enjoy the refreshing coolness along the little foot-paths where it casts its light, all that makes it a 'friend'. And the primitive goes along happily *per amica silentia lunae*. He does not 'adore' it any more than he does the sun or stars; but he is happy to greet its return; he is alarmed at the dangers threatened by an eclipse, and he attests a sort of distant gratefulness to it for all the services it renders to him."<sup>315</sup>

STARS<sup>316</sup>

The Bantu pay very little attention to stars. The evening star is often known as 'the moon's wife', but oftener still as the star which indicates the approach of supper-time. The morning-star, since it ushers in the dawn, is the signal for spies and sorcerers to turn back and travellers and hunters to be up and doing. More heed is given to the Pleiades than to any other constellation; because, year by year as it stands out complete in the morning sky, it shows that the digging season has come round again.<sup>317</sup> Quite a number of stars are given vernacular names, but nothing tantamount to star-worship has been reported from any Bantu area. The nearest approach to it comes from Kenya Colony, where the influence of Hamitic culture has been felt for thousands of years. Hobley reports<sup>318</sup> that "When a 'Kikuyu sees a

<sup>315</sup> RP. 50-51.

<sup>316</sup> See also SB. 63.

<sup>317</sup> RSZ. 395-98, IPNR. ii. 219, GGC. 315, NGW. 132.

<sup>318</sup> JRAI. 1911, p. 448.

morning star he picks up a little earth, spits on it and throws it in the direction of the star; he then takes a little mutton fat and rubs it over his face. This is said to be done because the star is looked upon as a manifestation of *Engai*, the Supreme Being." We shall learn more about *Engai* in our next volume; at present it is enough to remark that the Akikuyu probably got the word from their Masai neighbors, who are what Dr. Haddon calls 'Half-Hamites'.

Fragments of unwritten vernacular literature suggest, however, that the Bantu are not wholly insensitive to the poetry of the stars. Casalis, in his rendering of a Basuto folk-tale entitled *The Metamorphosis of a Maiden*,<sup>319</sup> gives both words and music of a song in which a persecuted damsel bursts out into an apostrophe to a star, crying, 'Star, little star!' and 'Oh, my star! my little star!' One of the *Dipina tsa Maitisho a Dialogane Motlhapudi* ('Songs of the Leisure of the Returners, the Clean ones'), sung at the revels that are held at the home-coming of Initiates from the Boys' Puberty Rites of the First Degree, is addressed to a star. I translate a fragment that I took down from the dictation of one of Khama's Makalaka, who declared that the song ran through many other verses that had faded from his memory. It consists of solo and chorus.

- (One girl) "Oh! Oh! Star! Traveller!  
Thou who sinkest below the western horizon.
- (Men, all) "I say, O dost thou not see the road?  
Traveller! Thou who sinkest below the western horizon.
- (One girl) "They who travel are thine, Thou traveller!  
Thou who sinkest below the western horizon.
- (Men, all) "I say, this I say, the Milky Way, don't you see it?  
O Thou traveller! Thou who sinkest below the western horizon.
- (One girl) "O dost thou not hear the child who is instructed?  
Thou traveller! Thou who sinkest below the western horizon."

This song, I am told, is peculiar to tribes that are Makalaka in origin or association. I thought it a pious appeal to a star;

<sup>319</sup> Bs. 344.

but my Makalaka friends scouted the suggestion, declaring that there was no tradition of star-worship among their people and that this was nothing more than an old song. Nevertheless it is as lonesome and impressive among Makalaka ditties as ruins of the Zimbabwe sort among Makalaka villages. Nilus, the fourth century hermit of Mount Sinai, may have heard nomadic Arabs chanting some such antiphon as they circled round the boy of special beauty whom they were about to sacrifice to the morning star at its rising;<sup>320</sup> but surely it is an exotic in its present surroundings.

CLOUDS<sup>321</sup>

Some Bantu tribes assert that rain-clouds are likely to leave in a huff if pointed at with the forefinger, and that the black storm-clouds in which lightning-birds perch are instruments of divine vengeance; but they seem not to regard clouds as divinities.

## RAINBOW

Zulus call the rainbow *utingo lwenkosikazi* ('the bow of the queen'), and girls who long for buxom bosoms rub their breasts with earth when they see it. Kidd has an interesting statement of Kafir notions about the rainbow, in which a queen of heaven figures:<sup>321</sup> "The bow [rainbow] is declared to be some of the wattles of the hut of the Queen of Heaven, or a queen in heaven. The wattles of a hut are bent in a similar curve during building operations, and a half-finished hut shows the structure to perfection . . . .

"When the natives worship this Queen of Heaven, the girls take off their petticoats and put on the loin-skins of the young men; they then rush into the cattle-kraal—a thing absolutely forbidden at other times—seize the oxen, and drive them out into the veldt. They herd them all day and night. Next morning the girls drive the oxen up to the kraal, and the cattle are milked by the men. The girls go to their own huts and make

<sup>320</sup> *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*. By Jane Ellen Harrison, p. 467.  
<sup>321</sup> EK. 112-13.

<sup>322</sup> For the control of rain-clouds by ancestor-spirits, see SB. 64ff., 203-219, 251-54, 275, 284, 354, 369f.

beer. Also they select some seed for sowing and go off into the veld to a specially selected spot of land, where they plant the seed after they have hoed up the ground. They pour some beer into a pot, which is placed in a hole in the ground. When the grain is grown it is considered sacred, and is left for the Queen of Heaven, who is supposed to come down in a mist<sup>323</sup> to consume the food and the beer.

"But there are many other suggestions concerning the rainbow. Sometimes it is said to be a sheep that comes out of a pool. I could never find any explanation of this idea. When I have asked natives for fuller information they have said, laughingly, 'This is all we know: it is a sheep'. If a rainbow is seen to rest on a pool, the people are afraid of bathing in it, though witch-doctors love to bathe in such water; they say it enables them to divine with great success. The Mashonas say that if any one manages to run to the spot where the rainbow rests on the earth he will find a large brass ornament. (A similar belief prevails among English children.) No one ever seems to find this ornament, and so the story is on a level with our advice to children about catching birds by placing salt on their tails.

"Other natives say that the rainbow is a disease, or causes a disease, and that if it rests on a person he is sure to die. Yet again it is said to be a snake in the sky."<sup>324</sup>

*Ukunje wa Mulungu* ('Mulungu's bow') is the Yao name for the rainbow; and the Nyanja speak of it as *uti wa Lezi* ('Leza's bow').<sup>325</sup> The Baila also know it as 'Leza's bow'; and when it is so brilliant that it 'stops the rain from falling', they point at it in dumb show with a pestle to drive it away.<sup>326</sup> The Bakaonde regard the rainbow as a 'manifestation of Leza' (whatever that may mean), and hold that any man who goes to the spot where it touches the ground will be bitten by a snake.<sup>327</sup> Native philosophers in North-east Angola explain that the phenomenon is caused by the reflection of the sun on the back of a snake called *ngongolo*.<sup>328</sup> According to an Alunda legend, it was on a rainbow

<sup>323</sup> Cf. my p. 36.

<sup>324</sup> Cf. my pp. 9, 10f., 17f.

<sup>325</sup> NBGA. 57.

<sup>326</sup> IPNR. ii. 220.

<sup>327</sup> WBA. 155

<sup>328</sup> WBT. 305, and cf. my pp. 6f., 10f.

that Nzambi slid down to earth in days when the gods were young.<sup>329</sup> Mulungu, Leza, and Nzambi can wait for the next volume, here we are content to note the fact that we have failed to find any indication that Bantu tribesmen look upon the rainbow as a divinity.

## LIGHTNING

Dread of lightning is probably coeval and certainly coextensive with the human race, to say nothing of the lower animals. "The Romans," for example, "regarded as sacred, and fenced off from the public with appropriate warnings, the spot of ground where a lightning flash struck, or where a thunder-stone was supposed to have fallen;"<sup>330</sup> and all over Africa the suddenness, fierceness, and mystery of the lightning-stroke has awed the tribesman and played upon his imagination.

Ellis, writing that lightning is propitiated by offerings in Negro Africa,<sup>331</sup> did not explain what he meant by 'propitiated'; and his remark that 'medicine' is placed on things struck by lightning is suggestive of cathartic magic rather than worship. Dennett thinks that Jakuta, now a mere marriage *orisha*<sup>335</sup> in Nigeria, is the thunderbolt rather than the lightning, and that inasmuch as he is said to have been *alafin* (king) of Oyo, he really represents the spirit of the departed father in heaven.<sup>332</sup> We gather from Talbot<sup>333</sup> that prehistoric stone implements, which are found in Nigeria, as in most parts of Africa, are thought to be thunderbolts that Jakuta hurled down upon his foes, but that *Jakuta, thrower of stones, is merely a title of Shango, the lightning-god. Shango is a full-blown god, served by a regular priesthood. Houses struck by lightning were plundered by his people and the household fined for having offended him; and persons knocked senseless by lightning were killed, since it was thought that he had need of them. Nevertheless, there are indications, so Talbot thinks, that Shango was a deified hero who was apotheosized. Shango, the fourth king of the Yoruba*

<sup>329</sup> WBA 164

<sup>330</sup> Bo 16

<sup>331</sup> *Negro Culture in West Africa*, p 91

<sup>332</sup> NS 65-7, 72

<sup>333</sup> SN 11 31f

<sup>335</sup> *Orisha*=the deified spirit of a dead person

dynasty is described in Johnson's *History of the Yorubas*<sup>334</sup> as a man of wild disposition and fiery temper, who, knowing something of legerdemain, used to astound his subjects by emitting fire and smoke from his mouth, and once struck terror into his foes by performing this trick on the battlefield. After finding his niche in the Yoruba pantheon of dynastic gods, he was accordingly invested with control of thunder and lightning. Whether it took more than one generation to transform him from an ancestor-spirit into a nature-spirit, cannot be discovered. The date of his reign is uncertain; for there is hardly any historical evidence of the movements of the Yorubas before the beginning of the eighteenth century,<sup>335</sup> and the chronology of their older traditions is obscure. Tradition says that he was the second son of Awranyan and succeeded his elder brother, Ajaka, as king of the Yorubas;<sup>337</sup> and that Awranyan was son and successor of Oduduwa, who led one of the earliest bands of Yorubas that invaded what is now called Southern Nigeria. Oduduwa may have flourished in the latter half of the first millennium of our era,<sup>338</sup> and his grandson, Shango, may have obtained Greek fire from the Mediterranean or the east, but it is possible, so Talbot thinks, that his reputation as lord of the lightning was due to firearms that he obtained from Portuguese mariners when they first sailed along the Nigerian coast at the beginning of the sixteenth century.<sup>339</sup> Such chronology is foggy enough; but it seems fairly clear that Shango was once king of the Yorubas and came to be regarded as a proper nature-spirit.<sup>340</sup> His grandfather, Oduduwa, achieved a similar triumph: he was identified with the earth-goddess after his apotheosis;<sup>341</sup> but that fate, except for its astonishing change of sex, has often befallen famous African leaders who founded new dynasties and left their bones in a new land.<sup>342</sup>

<sup>334</sup> *Op. cit.* pp. 34, 149, 150.

<sup>335</sup> SN. i. 280.

<sup>337</sup> SN. i. 279.

<sup>338</sup> SN. i. 278.

<sup>339</sup> SN. i. 282.

<sup>340</sup> SN. ii. 31.

<sup>341</sup> SN. i. 279.

<sup>342</sup> Cf. SB. 203-255, 278 and my pp. 69-78.

But the Yorubas are a Sudanese tribe, and we must return to Bantu beliefs.

The Zulus maintain that there is a male and female heaven; that the male thunders and does no damage and the female kills with forked lightning.<sup>343</sup> If the spot where the lightning struck the ground be examined, they say the shaft of the dazzling spear that was hurled through the air will be found there. But some other tribesmen of the same great Kafir-Zulu group believe that a special brown bird will be found there. Natives of Pondoland say that lightning is caused by a brown bird that spits down fire upon the earth; and some Natives of Natal attribute it to a white bird of enormous size that comes down and flaps its wings.<sup>344</sup> Some Kafirs have told me that the lightning-bird (*impundulu*) is really a person who shakes the heaven with his roaring.

Very many Bantu tribesmen accept the incredible but well-nigh world-wide belief that thunder is a bird with red feathers, or with red on some part of its body. In Basutoland lightning, especially when accompanied by a storm, was usually connected with a bird called *ilali* ('lightning'); an idea that may have originated, as Ellenberger thinks, in the falling of some strange, storm-driven and exhausted sea-bird upon the plains or hills of Basutoland.<sup>345</sup> He supports this hypothesis with a story that was told him by one of the Baphuthi of Masitisi. "Long ago when I was a little boy living at Maphutsing," said the story-teller, "my comrades and I were herding our fathers' cattle. There had been a storm and it was still raining. As we followed our cattle, we saw a bird, like unto a vulture, sitting on an ant-heap. We ran towards it, and I, getting there first, struck the bird on the head with my stick, and so killed it. We never saw a bird like this bird. Its body was rather short for so big a bird; but its wings were so long that one of them covered two of us. Its eyes were large and like those of an owl. We marvelled at its strength and ferocity, for before we killed it, the cattle being attracted by the strange smell that came from it, came near to it, but the bird drove them away. When the rain ceased we brought it to the

<sup>343</sup> RSZ. 401-402. Hottentots says that Thunder (*Gurub*) is a male, and lightning (*Nabas*) is his sister; and they regard them as minor deities. (Quatrefages: *The Pygmies*. pp. 218, 223.)

<sup>344</sup> EK. 120.

<sup>345</sup> HB. 250-51.



village. One of us took it on his back, and four others supported the extended wings, two on this side and two on that. The bird was heavy, but we were very proud, and in this way we approached the village. When we were yet a little way off, the men saw us, and stopped us by cries and gestures. The old chief, Mokuaoone, in great fear, ordered us to return and throw the bird away. He sent quickly for a *ngaka*, who knew how to work the lightning, and I and my companions were shut up in a hut which stood by itself outside the village, as if we were defiled. The doctor arrived and began to work us straightway with medicines. They were of two kinds: with one he sprinkled us, and with the other he inoculated us, for, without knowing it, we had carried the lightning on our backs and nearly brought evil on the village. After this purification we were allowed to enter the village and go home. As for the bird, it was cut up into little pieces, and the doctors came from all the region round about to buy the pieces, and for each piece they paid a goat. For, said they, we shall now make medicine that will vanquish the lightning."

Moffat, speaking of the Becwana, says: "Thunder they supposed to be caused by a certain bird which may be seen soaring very high during the storm, and which appeared to the natives as if it nestled among the forked lightnings. Some of these birds are not infrequently killed, and their having been seen to descend to the earth may have given rise to this ludicrous notion. I have never had an opportunity of examining this bird, but I presume it belongs to the vulture species."<sup>346</sup>

The Northern Becwana told me often that lightning is a bird, and some added that thunder is caused by the flapping of its wings. In 1901 a *tladi*,<sup>347</sup> said to be almost the height of a man, was found dead at a little lake named Poañwe, some seven miles from Phalapye, where I was then living. The medicine-men appropriated it so quickly that I had no chance of seeing even one of its feathers, but I judged from Native descriptions that it was a flamingo; and some canny old hunters in the tribe remarked, with a chuckle, that 'lightning-birds' were plentiful enough at the Makarikari pans. In Khama's country the flamingo is never

<sup>346</sup> MLSSA. 338.

<sup>347</sup> *Tladi* is their word for either 'lightning' or 'lightning-bird.'

seen east of the Makarikari, and the probability is that this was a storm-driven specimen that came down, half-dead, upon the first little lake that lay in its path.

Le Roy writes:<sup>348</sup> "Assuredly the most stupid savage does not believe that the sun is *really* a man, the moon *really* a woman, stars *really* their children, the lightning a big bird, the thunder an animal. He says all that, no doubt: but it is a 'manner of talking.' Have we not also our tales and legends? Do we not always find the unusual and marvelous interesting? When our children ask us to tell them some 'stories', are they not manifesting their taste and showing what little importance they attach to the question of authenticity? Very well, the taste of the primitive is quite similar." There is admittedly some truth in this judgment, but, in so far as the 'lightning-bird' is concerned, the foregoing narratives throw doubt upon its inevitableness.

The Mashona say that the 'bird of heaven' kills those who work on taboo-days. *Nada*, the Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual, December 1924,<sup>349</sup> contains an article which sets forth a belief, current among local Natives, that lightning, when it strikes, lays eggs in the ground near by. The story tells how a 'Lightning Doctoress' was clever enough to deceive people by burying hen's eggs at the spot; but it is eloquent testimony to the implicit belief of Mashona and Matebele in the reality of the 'lightning-bird.' The writer of the article states that the Matebele name for this bird is *isivolovolo*, but that the only Mashona equivalent that he had been able to find is *shiri ye denga* ('the bird of heaven').

Among the Tumbuka, "lightning is conceived of as a black bird like a cock. It kills people with its fiery breath, and marks them with its claws. The shining of the lightning is caused by its descent, and the thunder is the noise of its wings as it ascends. Its favorite place of descent is among the bamboos, and natives place tall bamboo poles in front of the door of their huts that this deadly bird may descend without harming the helpless inhabitants."<sup>350</sup>

<sup>348</sup> RP. 52.

<sup>349</sup> pp. 61-62.

<sup>350</sup> WPP. 132.

In North-east Angolaland, "there is a fabulous monster which lives in the clouds. It is known by the name of *nzazi*. The fable has it that it descends in the thunderstorms to split and fell trees, burn up houses, distribute skin diseases, and strike dead anybody who happens to be in its way. Its weapon is fire. It burns up everything it touches."<sup>351</sup>

The Becwana are acquainted, also, with black stones which they call *diwagodimo* ('things-which-fall-from-above') and believe to be thunderbolts.<sup>352</sup> I have never seen one of them, but judge from the many descriptions that I have received that they are either meteoric stones or paleolithic implements, probably the former. Being credited with magic potency, they are ground to powder and mixed with the 'medicine' in the tribal horn, and in horns that are blown at rain and war rites.

But lightning, whether as a flashing spear, a bird, or a monster, is generally regarded as an instrument of divine judgment. Callaway states<sup>353</sup> that the Zulus regard death from lightning-stroke as a judgment from above, and quotes Arbousset and Casalis as finding the same idea among the Lighoyas and Basuto, respectively. Whether the word 'above' in Callaway's statement means anything more than that the lightning comes evidently from the sky, is open to question. When forked lightning has been very vivid, I have sometimes heard Becwana call it *Thupaeamodimo* ('the-scourge-of-god'), but I always found in their discussion of the phrase that if the Great Chief of the Spirit-world did wield the scourge with his own hand—which was doubtful—it was the resentment of ancestor-spirits that brought the judgment upon them.

The Akamba believe that lightning (*utisi*) and thunder (*kitalaliki*) is brought by a *Muimu* at the orders of *Engai*, and that it is the thunder, not the lightning, that kills people. Hobley tells us<sup>354</sup> that if a person is killed by lightning, no one will touch the corpse, because they hold that that person was killed by God—'God' being, probably, his translation of *Engai*, whom we shall consider later.

<sup>351</sup> WBT. 124.

<sup>352</sup> Cf. SB. 293.

<sup>353</sup> RSZ. 60.

<sup>354</sup> AK. 55.

"There are many ways of warding off lightning," writes Kidd.<sup>356</sup> "The Kafirs sometimes place assagais through the roof when the storm begins, thinking that this will ward off the lightning. Other tribes place a hoe standing against the outside of the hut to perform the same function."

Callaway describes<sup>357</sup> Zulu medicine-men who specialize in defending villages from hail and lightning, and who are known as 'Sky-herds', because they go forth to guide the storm with spear (or stick) and shield, whistling, shouting, and scolding, much as Zulu herdsmen do. To be of any service, they must be summoned while the storm is still distant; and it is useless to call a hail-doctor for a thunder-storm, or a lightning-doctor for a hail-storm. Their methods are not very divergent, however: they both burn 'medicines' in an open fire, so that the smoke may ascend to the sky, and shout and scold the clouds, striking their sticks upon their shields. The 'Sky-doctor' is, however, the protégé of the sky, not one who contends with it, and much fasting is said to be necessary for the proper performance of his functions. Thunderbolts, lightning-birds, and things struck by lightning have the power of the sky in them; and, by scarifying his body and rubbing in a 'medicine' which he has made from these things, the 'doctor' becomes so sympathetic with the sky, that he feels with it, knows when it is going to thunder, and is able to counteract it. This, as Callaway wisely points out, is the homeopathic principle of magic; and it may be added that those who have grasped the Bantu idea of personality<sup>358</sup> find no difficulty in understanding why a 'Sky-herd's' blanket is thought to be efficacious if put out under a clouded sky when the practitioner himself is not available as a defence from the coming storm.

All this is magical rather than religious; but both magic and religion figure in the Zulu method of purifying the inhabitants of a village that has been struck by lightning. The people are scarified and made to take *umsizi*, and little rods are driven into the ground on the upper side of the village, on all paths in front of the village, and near the doorways and the entrance to the cattle-pen, and fixed on the tops of the houses; and a black sheep is

<sup>356</sup> EK. 121.

<sup>357</sup> RSZ. 375-393, 404-405, 407.

<sup>358</sup> See pp. 227-244.

sacrificed<sup>359</sup> 'that the heaven may be dark', and the little rods and the scarifications on the people's bodies are rubbed with 'medicine' prepared from this sacrifice. This explanation, 'that the heavens may be dark', is magic and just what one would expect from a Native; but tribesmen are much better able to describe their own customs than to interpret them, and I doubt its correctness. Callaway takes it to mean that where the black sheep has been sacrificed, the sky cannot see clearly enough to strike the same place again. I am of opinion, however, that whenever the Bantu offer a black animal, it may be confidently assumed that the sacrifice was originally intended for discarnate human spirits; and when we remember that the spirits of a Bantu dynasty are usually credited with profound influence over the weather and everything else that pertains to the fertility of their country,<sup>360</sup> there is little difficulty in believing that this sacrifice was once, if not now, intended to placate some angry dynastic divinity.

Whether the Becwana use similar medicated rods or pegs in purifying a village from the levin-stroke, I have not heard; they do use such pegs to protect their villages from the spells of unfriendly magicians, and they insert tiny twigs in the crown of the roof to prevent lightning from striking a hut. Bullock states<sup>361</sup> that the Mashona place these rods on the apex of the roof to keep owls from alighting there and hooting; but when I told my Becwana advisers of this Mashona practice, they insisted that their rods were to ward off lightning-stroke, though they confessed that they shared the Mashona belief that when an owl alights on a roof and hoots, it is a sure sign that a witch dwells below.

Claridge mentions that there is but one fetish in Northeast Angola which is credited with power to control lightning; but though he says that it is beaten with a knife and adjured to flay and skin an enemy as lightning barks a tree, he says nothing of any protective power that it may be supposed to possess.<sup>362</sup>

Among the Kafirs, so Kidd tells us,<sup>363</sup> "When the children are

<sup>359</sup> Cf. SB. 214, 217f., 225, 284, 289, 345, 350.

<sup>360</sup> See SB. 203-255.

<sup>361</sup> MLC. 87.

<sup>362</sup> WBT. 124.

<sup>363</sup> EK. 203.

ten days old they have to undergo a peculiar ceremony. The mother selects a spot of ground on which there is a tree that has been struck by lightning; a hole is dug at the root of this tree, and the child is placed in the excavation. The mother chews medicines and spits them out on the child, after which she has to retire to a distance, never turning back to look at the child, no matter how much it may cry. To look back would bring endless trouble on the child. After a short time the mother returns, takes her baby out of the hole, and feels quite sure that she has thus instilled courage into its small heart."

## SPIRITS OF THE WILD

Before shifting the centre of interest from nature-spirits to high-gods, we ought to take a passing glance at a crowd of supernatural beings who are akin to the fairies, elves, dwarfs, giants, and devils of European folklore. These phantoms of Bantu fancy differ considerably from one another, but may be conveniently grouped together as spirits of the wild, since they are found only in waste places.

British fairies and elves caper in the moonlight where people of the stone age lived and died.<sup>364</sup> They are occasionally heard of in other out-of-the-way places, but raths, barrows, hut-circles, stone-circles, dolmens, and megalithic tombs are their habitations, and Hallowe'en, the night when Celts and Saxons expected the dead to revisit their old homes, is the time when they hold annual high jinks at these old sacred places.<sup>365</sup> They are 'little people',<sup>366</sup> clad in tattered green, with either red hoods or straw hats upon their heads, who move from place to place, appear and disappear, with the quickness of thought. They shun iron: even such treasures as ancient glass beads are safe from their pilfering fingers if enclosed in an iron box;<sup>367</sup> but neolithic arrow-heads are 'elf-bolts', and perforated disks of stone that neolithic folks used as spindle-whorls or weights for digging-sticks are 'fairy millstones'. These 'men of peace' are not a bad sort; they are 'good people', subject to human passions (love, jealousy,

<sup>364</sup> Cf. p. 145n.

<sup>365</sup> GB. Pt. VII., Vol. I. pp. 225-27.

<sup>366</sup> Cf. SB. 17ff.

<sup>367</sup> GB. Pt. VII., Vol. I. pp. 15f.

envy, revenge) and fond of laughing and riding the colts round the field by night at full gallop. They sometimes help men, but like to keep their names secret<sup>368</sup> and to work and play 'unheard and unespied'. They are thought by our rustics to be freakish, one moment doing a good turn and the next taking offence at a trifle,<sup>369</sup>—which means, I suppose, that they are of foreign mentality. If a person strikes their fancy, they may carry him off to their underground domain; but he who ventures near their knolls at night is more likely to be pixy-led, floundering in bogs and ditches till the life is frightened out of him,—unless he has sense enough to break the spell by turning his jacket inside out, or his pockets at any rate.<sup>370</sup> They seem to be the guardians of the ancient burial-places, for they addle the wits of treasure-seekers who dig round dolmens for pots of gold—if such people have wits! What can they be—these fairies, elves, pucks, sprites (known by a dozen names)—but ghosts of an alien race that peopled our uplands in the remote past!<sup>371</sup> Gnomes, called kobolds in Germany, are fairies of the mines. In my boyhood I often heard Cornish miners telling of 'nuggeys' that they had heard when "scratching away on the old men's backs", as they termed the levels near ancient workings. 'Nuggeys' are called 'knockers' in other parts of Cornwall, and are said by the miners to be the ghosts of Jews that Roman emperors sent to work the mines.<sup>372</sup>

Now people of the stone age had made their home in Africa for centuries before the ancestors of any other living African race arrived upon the scene, and scattered groups of them still live after the ancient manner in remote parts of that continent. They are well known to the Bantu. They built no megalithic tombs and raised no monoliths at their sacred places; but they dotted Africa with their graves, strewed it with stone implements, and adorned its caves and rock-shelters with pictures that reveal intimate acquaintance with the beasts of the field. They were averse to tillage and stock-farming, but were expert hunters, fishers, and collectors of whatever the uncultivated earth

<sup>368</sup> Cf. p. 238.

<sup>369</sup> CNQ. 70-77.

<sup>370</sup> Cf. p. 207n.

<sup>371</sup> Cf. SB. 155n.; RAC. 66, 166; RSZ. 226f.; and my *Race Problems in the New Africa*, pp. 67f.

<sup>372</sup> CNQ. 68f.

yields for nourishment or comfort;<sup>373</sup> and they lived a roving life, resented interference and restraint, claimed to be masters of the wilderness, and withstood intrusion. Bantu tribes that pushed into fresh fields had to reckon with these untamed children of an untamed land, who alone knew where the hidden waters of the desert lay, and whose little poisoned arrows brought silent messages of death from the slenderest of cover; but they were difficult people to make terms with, for they were of another mentality, baffling, elusive, and prone to misunderstand. Since death makes no change in character or vocation,<sup>374</sup> according to Bantu belief, it is supposed that their ghosts lurk in coverts, frequent fish-pools, roam over game-lands and make merry at old camping-places, as touchy and freakish as ever. Humor them, and they may be helpful; flout them, and they are sure to be nasty; but be careful in any case, for they are often stung by what is meant for an affable approach. In shape and size they are said to be much the same as other ghosts, except that many of them are as ugly as foreigners often are. All subterranean folks are of small stature, so the Bantu say;<sup>375</sup> and some say that they have eyes in the back of the head, or feet turned the wrong way round, or some contrariety of figure that befits denizens of that contrary world in which the sun spends the *night* travelling from west to east.<sup>376</sup> That which distinguishes the ghosts of Bushmen from those of Bantu lineage is not so much difference of figure as of mentality, temper, and interests. Perhaps that is why most writers have little to say about them and others confuse them with other supernatural beings.

A Zulu gave Callaway "The account of the Inkosazana [Little Chieftainess] who came out on the same day that men came out of the earth",<sup>377</sup> and added the following comment. "It is not said that she is an Itongo [Ancestor-spirit], for she speaks with men of her own accord. I never heard that they pray to her for anything, for she does not dwell with men, but in the forest, and is unexpectedly met by a man, who has gone out about his

<sup>373</sup> See NRSA. Chaps. I-XII.

<sup>374</sup> SB. 17.

<sup>375</sup> SB. 64ff.

<sup>376</sup> SB. 74f.

<sup>377</sup> RSZ. 253-56.



own affairs, and he brings her message." No living person has ever seen the Inkosazana; for when she comes at night to a man in the wilderness or the garden or the home, she conceals herself and cries, "Turn your back: do not look on me, for I am naked", and forthwith delivers her message without being seen. And everybody knows that to see her face to face, or to conceal her words, or to ignore her counsel is to court death or disaster. But "the primitive men knew her", so the Zulus say; and there is a traditional description of her appearance. "She is said to be a very little animal, as large as a polecat, and is marked with little white and black stripes; on one side there grows a bed of reeds, a forest, and grass; the other side is that of a man. Such is her form." It takes the lively imagination of a Zulu to visualize such a form; but there it is! And "she goes followed by a large troop of children which resemble her." Although she does not rank as an ancestor-spirit nor dwell with men, she sometimes promises a good harvest, and seems to be in touch with local affairs; for now and then she orders the women to wean their babies, or tells the girls whether they are to marry old men or young ones this year, or wants beer to be made and poured out on the mountain. And her word is heeded. This 'Little Chieftainess' is perhaps the nearest Zulu equivalent to the Elf-queen of British fairy tales. She lacks the daintiness of Shakespeare's Titania and attendant nymphs, it is true, but nobody looks for that in Zululand.

"According to the missionaries of the Kasai-Lulua," writes Johnston,<sup>378</sup> "the Baluba believe in a crowd of fantastic beings called *bashangi*, *bakishi*, who wander every night through the darkness, indulge in a thousand playful and grotesque games, and allow a glimpse of themselves from time to time in the form of shooting stars; they often come to terrify the living and scatter death in their villages; they are an evil race—'wicked fairies'—whose sole aim is to injure and whose chief happiness is to make people wretched. But it is also thought that these spirits can be the temporarily disembodied souls of wicked sorcerers." "Genii or fairies are believed in apart from the souls of men," he writes on another page,<sup>379</sup> remarking in a footnote

<sup>378</sup> GGC. 636n.

<sup>379</sup> GGC. 639.

that these are called *shimbi* by the Bakongo, *bakula* by the Babangi, *ngulu* in the South-west Tanganyika country, and *mi-pashi* on the Luapula, and that Bentley said, "sometimes they becomes incarnate. A pregnant woman dreams of fairies or of water, and then knows that her child is the incarnation of a *shimbi*."

If a pregnant woman of the Bakongo dreams of running water, snakes, or water-sprites (*simbi*), she believes that her child will be an incarnation of a water-sprite. "The sprites inhabit the streams, and the snakes live among the stones near the watercourses." The sprites are supposed to endow such children with the power of imparting good luck and of inflicting many misfortunes. "Snakes are either under the special protection of the water-sprites, or are incarnations of them, and . . . are not killed or hurt in a house where these sprite-children have been born;" and these children are not allowed to kill snakes, "lest they should kill one of their own kith and kin."<sup>380</sup> Albinos are incarnations of water-sprites, and can cause or cure hump-back, rheumatism and various other complaints and deformities. Their spirits do not go to the forest after death, but return to the water.<sup>381</sup>

Claridge asserts that the Bakongo recognize "two distinct orders of supernatural beings that are *good*: God, the Supreme Good, and Fairies—their nearest approach to an angelic order."<sup>382</sup> Criticism of his remark about 'God, the Supreme Good' must come later;<sup>383</sup> we are busy now with the fairies of Bakongo imagination. To the Bakongo, so Claridge believed, fairies are "a distinct class of supernatural beings, harmless and beneficial. They are a kind of ministering spirits, for the most part amiable and kind. They can be severe to those who insult them, but their normal attitude to mankind is friendly. . . . Their dwelling-places are in the rivers, streams, and water-brooks of the country."<sup>384</sup> "A person takes cold by bathing in the river before the sun is up, the fairies have smitten him with

<sup>380</sup> APB. 113ff.

<sup>381</sup> APB. 116.

<sup>382</sup> WBT. 268.

<sup>383</sup> In a future volume.

<sup>384</sup> WBT. 275.

influenza for bathing at the wrong time of the day. A few suspicious pimples after a bath are 'proof' that he went into the water where the nixies were taking their dip. . . . Children are forbidden to throw stones into the water for fear of injuring the eyes of the fairies. Boys and men will not fish in the deep side waters of the rivers, because tradition has it that the fairies habitually cook their fish in these still pools."<sup>385</sup> "The first thing a mother does when free [from her puerperium] is to make an offering to the fairies for her baby. She goes to the nearest stream, takes a leaf, places on it a sprinkling of chalk, salt, and flour, then sets it on the water to be carried down stream to the munificent elves. As the leaf floats away with its cargo of good things, she trills a little extemporaneous patter of gratitude to the maternal will-o'-the-wisps."<sup>386</sup> It is too much to assume that the Bakongo or any other Bantu tribe regard all riverine spirits as ghosts of an earlier race;<sup>387</sup> but the little men of the stone age, who roamed over the country for a very long time before the Bantu arrived, buried some of their dead in streams,<sup>388</sup> and some riverine spirits are sure to have taken their rise from these burials. Toosib<sup>389</sup> and Kaang,<sup>390</sup> no doubt, achieved immortality in this manner, and it may be that the Hili, Tikolosh, and Incanti of Kosa mythology<sup>391</sup> were Bushmen of distinction who took possession of streams as they laid aside their garments of flesh. If the Bushmen were at all given to burying their dead in streams during the thousands of years that they prowled over the country, very many of these streams must have had the reputation of being haunted by Bushman ghosts before the Bantu discovered them, and the tradition would chime in well with Bantu beliefs.

But fairies of Kongoland are not confined to the waters. "When the sun shines on distant objects, such as stones on the hillside, opal, glass, flint, quartz, lakes, etc., their reflection is seen a long way off and is thought to be the clothes of the fairies hanging out to dry after washing." If a man "gets ill by

<sup>385</sup> WBT. 276.

<sup>386</sup> WBT. 99.

<sup>387</sup> See my pp. 1-20.

<sup>388</sup> See p. 16.

<sup>389</sup> See p. 2n.

<sup>390</sup> See p. 18n.

<sup>391</sup> See p. 2.

leaving his house before cockcrow and going into the keen winds which usually blow at that time in the morning, it is because he has unwittingly intruded himself among the fairies at a time when they are *en fête* which is always held in the fine drizzle of the dawn."<sup>392</sup> "The fog which sometimes settles over the valleys, especially in the winter, is said to be the smoke from the fires kindled by the fairies to cook their victuals. The proverb says, 'Where the smoke is there are the fairies'. A whirlwind is a peri gyrating over the country in a frolicsome mood. A cyclone is the united fury of the fairies necessitated by the wilfulness of certain members of society . . . All animals belong to the fairies"<sup>393</sup>—he means wild animals, of course. Claridge had no sooner uttered this last sentence than he was called to order by the stern voice of Western logic and reminded that "hunters pray to the 'dead' for meat." If he had cultivated the art of 'thinking black', he would have accepted two incompatible beliefs without perturbation; but for want of that accomplishment he sought shelter in the frail European conjecture that "the 'dead' are agents of the fairies who attend to the distribution of live stock to the people." Nevertheless, he reiterated what his Kongo friends had so often told him, that "the fairies are the real owners." This idea is also brought out in a neat little fairy-tale that affects to explain why a Kongo hunter always carries a little bag of salt.<sup>394</sup> "It is for the fairies should he happen on them in the hunt . . . Report has it that an ancient hunter was imprisoned by the fairies for having shot an animal without their permission . . . He was dragged off to nixiedom and shut up in an elfin castle where they set a little sylph to watch him. They brought him food without salt, but as he had salt in his shoulder bag he seasoned it for himself. The sylphid saw him do it and begged to taste it. Apparently salt was unknown in fairyland. After sipping meditatively from the spoon, the little elf seized the whole potful and made off to where the *perian* authorities were feasting. They at once confiscated the luxury, paid a visit to the hunter in state, and ceremoniously dismissed him to mansland with a huge national order for salt. Since then

<sup>392</sup> WBT. 276.<sup>393</sup> WBT. 275.<sup>394</sup> WBT. 88.

every hunter puts a pinch or two of salt in his knapsack before he goes off with the pack."

All this is in keeping with our supposition that these fairies, like our own, are ghosts of an earlier race. But Claridge confuses them with Bantu ancestor-spirits when he states that fairies punish tribesmen for reprehensible social behaviour; that the mouthful of liquid which devout people pour on the ground before drinking is for the fairies; and that the portions of a ritualistic meal that are thrown to the four winds are intended for their use.<sup>395</sup> The same confusion appears in the last sentences of his chapter on the 'Theory of Good Spirits'. "Fairies, then," he wrote,<sup>396</sup> "are the best friends the Congolese have. They give animals to hunt, to kill, and to feast upon. They give beautiful children with fairy character, fairy ways, and other fairy things." Now, the most beautiful children that are given to the Bantu come into the world with 'grandfather's mouth' or 'uncle John's eyes' or some other ancestral feature; and when Claridge wrote 'fairy' as a synonym for 'dainty', he was thinking of English story-books and Drury Lane, not of fairies that take birth from the fullness of Bantu emotion. The Bantu never think of fairies as charming creatures. They believe, as he says,<sup>397</sup> that fairies can assume any form, turning themselves even into grass or reeds when that suits the occasion; but when Bantu fairies take human form, it is always that of an ugly old man or woman. This is the motif of the fairy-tale that he records on the same page—a tale that is told with endless variations all over Africa; the fairy was such an ugly old hag that a woman working in the gardens feared to give her a drink of water, but a man on the road with a calabash of wine treated her generously, in spite of her loathsome appearance; and the flood came, overwhelming the woman who had shown disgust and bringing fish in abundance to traps that the uncanny wanderer had advised her benefactor to set in his garden.<sup>398</sup>

The Baila believe in *tuyobela* (sing, *kayobela*), a class of ghosts that witches have 'pressed' into their service. *Tuyobela*,

<sup>395</sup> See WBT. 275f.; and cf. IPNR. i. 132, ii. 123, and SB. 367, 374.

<sup>396</sup> WBT. 278.

<sup>397</sup> WBT. 277.

<sup>398</sup> Cf. my p. 6.

Smith & Dale say,<sup>399</sup> "have two characteristics peculiar to themselves: first, they chirp and twitter like birds<sup>400</sup> hence the name (*kuyobela*, 'to twitter'), and second, they are dwarfish. We might call them elves. Some people have seen them. Mungalo told us that he had: and he was amazed to find what funny things they were. 'What are all these children?' was his first thought. On looking again he saw that, although they were very short, only about eighteen inches high, they had the bodies of full-grown men, only they were turned round the other way, so that their bellies and faces were at the back;<sup>401</sup> their hair was all standing upright. They live in and around their master's hut, and his wife must cook plenty of food for them, or they would beat her." I suppose that the reason why "we might call them elves" is that "they are dwarfish"; but that is not enough to mark them off from other dwellers in the underworld, nor is the reversed aspect of their faces and bellies; for the Bantu say that all dwellers in the underworld have undergone some such transformation,<sup>402</sup> though the dead appear in dreams as they appeared in life, with the same scars, the same gait, and even the same garments. The odd thing about Mungalo's little people is that "their hair was all standing upright." Mungalo must have had some reason, subjective or objective, for giving this touch to his picture; but, so far as we know, all former dwellers in his country had hair of the peppercorn variety—Bushmen certainly had.<sup>403</sup>

The Kaonde people, some two hundred miles north of the Baila, talk of *tuyewera* (sing. *kayewera*) *Tuyobela* and *tuyewera* are possibly dialectal variants of the same term, and there is hardly any difference between the notions for which they stand. "*Tuyewera*", writes Melland,<sup>404</sup> "are sprites of human shape, about three feet high with protruding bellies and with the body facing the wrong way in relation to the head and legs. They are invisible to all who have not certain medicine: the owners, of

<sup>399</sup> IPNR. ii. 132.

<sup>400</sup> Cf. SB. 17 and RSZ. 265, note 17.

<sup>401</sup> An Ashanti hunter and medicine-man gave a somewhat similar description of fairies (*mooatia*) that he said he had lived with for forty days. (RAA. 25f., 38.)

<sup>402</sup> See SB. 18, 64. The people of Bombay have a similar notion: they say "A spirit has no back and has its feet reversed." (Enthoven: *The Folklore of Bombay*, pp. 156, 157, 165, 168.)

<sup>403</sup> But see my p. 107.

<sup>404</sup> WBA. 204.

course, always have this medicine and can see them and converse with them." Melland thinks they are regarded as familiars that witches send out to steal for them, or to suck the breath out of sleeping victims. But he connects them with pixies. "There is a remarkable resemblance to *tuyewera*," he thinks,<sup>405</sup> "to be found in a Cornish legend of pixies who rewarded their friends by stealing for them. No one could see them, but one day, 'a pixy brought a woman a baby elf to nurse and gave her some ointment to rub on its eyes', but told the woman not to put it in her own eyes. She disobeyed and 'as she passed through the streets of Penzance saw hundreds of pixies stealing things out of all the shops'. She called her sister's attention to them, but the latter—not having the medicine could not see them. The pixies, being discovered, blew on the woman's eyes and made her blind. It will be noted that like the *tuyewera* the pixies' occupation was theft and that they could be seen only if certain medicine were rubbed on the eyes." But I doubt whether *tuyewera* should be classed with pixies for all that; because, according to Melland's account, when *tuyewera* suck the breath out of a victim's body and blow it back again into the buried corpse, the victim becomes another *kayewera*.<sup>406</sup>

*Awiri* (sing *Ombwiri*) is the Mpongwe<sup>408</sup> name for ancestor-spirits:<sup>407</sup> (like the word *abapansi*) and if this word means 'people of the *under world*,' as the adverbial root *-si*, or *-ri* seems to suggest, *tuyobela* and *tuyewera* may have come from the same stem and acquired local restrictions of meaning in the course of centuries, as well as local modifications of form.

But Mpongwe people talk of other supernatural beings, called *asiki* (sing. *isiki*), who are met in the path on dark nights. They are supposed to be human beings who were so bewitched in childhood that their growth was checked and their natures altered, and they became immortal. These mythical creatures are probably witches' familiars, though Nassau defines *isiki* in his

<sup>405</sup> WBA. 221.

<sup>406</sup> WBA. 206.

<sup>407</sup> FWA. 66ff., cf. my p. 25.

<sup>408</sup> Mpongwe is said to be a Native nickname (taken over by the Portuguese) for a people who called themselves Abuka. They are believed to have come into the basins of the Gabon and the Ogowe, in the comparatively distant past, from the south. CSBSL. ii. 142.

glossary as 'a dwarf changeling'. Their hair is described as straight and long, not woolly;<sup>409</sup> but a flurried wayfarer, unacquainted with Central African coiffures, might say the same thing of those Bantu exquisites who have their woolly hair uncurled with bees-wax and spliced with vegetable fibres. Nassau's definition of *isiki* as 'a dwarf changeling' is probably a misuse of the word 'changeling'. A changeling was not a child that had been bewitched, as he seems to have thought, but a puling elf that some fairy had left in exchange for a healthy baby that she had stolen; and I can find no cogent reason for counting Bantu witches' familiars among fairies. Although Smith suggested that *tuyobela*, being diminutive creatures, might be called elves, he made it quite clear that Baila suppose them to be ghosts of men and women who were 'pressed' by witches and are now in their employ.<sup>410</sup> This is in harmony with what the Bantu everywhere believe; for they undoubtedly hold that souls of living people may be snatched by malevolent magic,<sup>411</sup> and accuse their witches of exhuming recently buried corpses that they may kidnap souls that have not yet been sent (by finished mortuary rites<sup>412</sup>) to their homes in the underworld.

*Ilaga* (sing. *olaga*) is another Mpongwe word for 'ghosts'—ghosts of strangers.<sup>413</sup> The land of every Bantu community was sprinkled with graves of former inhabitants before it came to its present occupants, and ghosts of the kinless dead are said to haunt the sites of their old abodes. The Vandau say<sup>414</sup> that there is no ridge on which nobody is buried, and that the coming of jackals, hyenas, or owls night after night, or the appearance of snakes in unusual numbers, is a sure sign that the kinless dead are afoot. They call these ghosts *marombo*, and propitiate them, not with beer and meat, as they do their own dead, but with thin gruel in a potsherd. They pour this gruel on the ground outside

<sup>409</sup> FWA. 299-302.

<sup>410</sup> IPNR. ii. 95, 132f. Smith is a master of the Ila language, and I know nothing of it; but I wonder whether 'pressed' is a good rendering of the idea behind *kudimba* and *mudimbe*. Is this word not made up of -dim-, the stem of-dimo, and -bi or -be, the stem of many Bantu words for 'bad'? And if so, is it not 'soul-spoiling' or 'soul-vitiating' rather than 'soul-pressing'?

<sup>411</sup> See, e. g., SB. 311; LSAT. ii. 340f.; and my pp. 237f.

<sup>412</sup> SB.. 36ff.

<sup>413</sup> FWA. 67f.

<sup>414</sup> Wilder: *Hartford Seminary Record*, April 1907. The Ndaui country lies on both sides of the eastern border of Mashonaland.



the village, part to the east and part to the west, as they invoke the restless ghosts: "*Marombo*, why are you threatening us with evil? Have we not planted gardens for you? Are we not going to give you beer?" When occupying a new kraal site, too, they place a box of snuff in the fork of a tree for the *marombo* and tell them that they are about to raise a hearth, plant gardens, and brew beer for them.<sup>415</sup> We should hardly have guessed that the gardens to be planted, the beer to be brewed, and the fires to be lighted, are for the ghosts of aliens who used to dwell upon that spot; but other tribes talk in the same strain. Baila call the forsaken sites of old villages *matongo*,<sup>416</sup> and avoid them at night for fear of the forlorn, cold, and hungry ghosts of former villagers that haunt the place; but when Smith or Dale made his abode at one of these places, an old chief assured

<sup>415</sup> See also my p. 8. The Chinese also make it a point of social obligation to give occasional alms to neglected and famished spirits of the dead; and though they regard them as agents and harbingers of woe, they are evidently softened by more humane sentiments. "Provision for the wandering spirits has formed an important part of Chinese religion", writes Dr. Hodous (*Folkways in China*, pp. 159-162). "Under the dynasty a regular State offering to these abandoned spirits in each provincial capital, prefecture, chou and district was performed by the magistrate or his proxy. The prayer or rather announcement made on this occasion gives a very clear idea of the purpose of the offering. It is as follows: . . . 'It should be remembered that in the realm of shades there are spirits to whom no offerings are made. Formerly these spirits were living men and it is not known how they died. Among them are those who died of wounds in battle. There are those who died on water, in fire, or were killed by thieves. Some were killed while they were robbing men. Others were killed in the act of abducting men's wives and concubines. Some met their death by judgment, although they had committed no crime. There were those who died by disease sent by Heaven. Some were killed by ravenous beasts and poisonous insects. Some died of hunger and cold. Some died in personal combats. Some succumbed to dangers. Some died because a wall fell on them. Some who died left no children. These orphaned souls without anyone to supply their wants are worthy of great pity. They lurk in the grass, or are attached to wood. Some of them cause strange phenomena, or monstrosities. Some cause strange apparitions. They wander to and fro under the light of the stars and the moon calling piteously to the wind and rain. Today we meet the exalted spirits and preside at this sacrifice respectfully placing the altar west of the city. In the month (first, seventh, or tenth) on the happy occasion we respectfully prepare animals, food, broth, and rice for the purpose of sacrificing to all the spirits to whom no one sacrifices in this whole district or prefecture.' In the evening of this day heads of households honour these spirits with candles, incense, small dumplings and cakes, and burn pictures of clothing for their benefit. Dr. Hodous tells me that though murderers are not specified in this proclamation, it is intended to cover all souls to whom no offerings are made by their family. Suicide is often highly regarded in China; and people despise the man who has not sense enough to do the appropriate thing after a defeat, or after his crime has been discovered."

<sup>416</sup> This is the Zulu word for 'ancestor-spirits': See RSZ. 129-227.

him that ghosts "are always glad when there is a village near, so that they can come and warm themselves at the fires and have friends to bring them food and drink."<sup>417</sup>

Spirits of aliens are sometimes honoured with normal offerings;<sup>418</sup> but those mentioned above belong to forgotten families or to families that have left the country. Junod says that "although the spirits of the departed generally have nothing to do with people other than their descendants, some of them, especially *those belonging to foreign tribes*, can take possession of living men and cause troubles which must be cured by a process of exorcism";<sup>419</sup> and Le Roy, speaking of evil spirits, notes "the curious fact" that some of them "are designated by the names of neighboring tribes".<sup>420</sup> Miss Earthy<sup>421</sup> throws light on this point. "The Va-Chopi", she says, "have been intimately connected in past times, through war and migrations of tribes, with the Va-Ngoni and the Va-Ndau, and both these tribes have left a strong impress upon the culture of the Va-Chopi . . . . All the Va-Chopi worship their ancestral spirits, but not all have to propitiate Va-Ngoni or Va-Ndau spirits as well. Sometimes there is a spirit of Va-Ndau origin haunting a certain family, descending from father to son, or from mother to daughter, or suddenly cropping up in some member of the family who is said to be possessed by it. The spirit is generally supposed to be avenging itself for some injury done in the past by some ancestor of the person possessed. Hence it becomes imperative to propitiate it by sacrifices, dances and communications with it in *séances*, until the hostile force is turned into a beneficent one."

The unquiet ghosts of persons who died with wrongs unredressed are heard of in all Bantu communities.<sup>422</sup> Baila assert that "the *mutala* is the vengeful destructive demon of an aggrieved person;"<sup>423</sup> Bakaonde describe it as a spirit that comes, sometimes in the form of legless corpse, wreaking vengeance

<sup>417</sup> IPNR. ii. 123f., cf. ii. 186.

<sup>418</sup> See SB. 81f., 202, 256f.

<sup>419</sup> LSAT. ii. 344.

<sup>420</sup> RP. 110.

<sup>421</sup> Writing in IRM. Oct. 1926 on "The Customs of Gazaland Women in Relation to the African Church."

<sup>422</sup> See SB. 83, 85, 86f., 165.

<sup>423</sup> IPNR. i. 266, ii. 115f., 135, 163.

upon social groups that wronged it while it was in the flesh;<sup>424</sup> and the last resource of a Wemba man who has a grievance and cannot get relief is to threaten the defaulter that he will commit suicide and rise up as an evil spirit to torment him.<sup>425</sup>

#### EVIL SPIRITS

Intensive and extensive study of available evidence has led me to the conclusion that all Bantu evil spirits are human ghosts<sup>426</sup> and that many of them are not suspected of moral obliquity. When a discarnate tribesman comes back armed with spirit-power to right wrongs that the wrongdoers refused to redress while he lived, his presence is fraught with peril to the offending or defaulting group; but, instead of being thereby recreant to tribal morality, he is simply doing his duty by his group in bringing its oppressors to book. The kinless dead, too, are not thought to be wicked people. Their ghosts, soured by the long lack of a friendly fire and suitable sustenance, are nasty to meet, but still human in temper and appetite, and often responsive to friendly treatment, pleasant company, and good cheer. They are aliens, of course; and tribalism regards aliens as potential enemies to be warily dealt with, or actual foes if they hail from a hostile group, and alien ghosts as more risky to meet than alien men. But spirits of aliens are not *ipso facto* knaves; on the contrary, they act in accordance with intertribal usage. Some of them were lords of the land in which their bones rest; and the outsider who seizes upon their estate without so much as 'By your leave' is asking for trouble;<sup>427</sup> but they often comply with a courteous request.

The truth is that the difference between good spirits and bad frequently consists in their relation to the observer: spirits that are well-disposed towards him he calls 'good', and those with whom he has no friendly relations he calls 'evil', even though their pious descendants consider them the pink of propriety; for 'evil' is applied to inimical circumstances as well as to wrong moral choices. It would be wrong to say that spirits are called

<sup>424</sup> WBA. 145.

<sup>425</sup> GPNR. 85.

<sup>426</sup> See RP. (cited in SB. 111) for contrary opinion.

<sup>427</sup> See my pp. 8, 98, 108.

'evil' because they bring trouble; for ancestor-spirits are not called 'evil'<sup>428</sup> when they bring disaster upon those of their descendants who fail in filial duty or fraternal behaviour.

But though spirits of aliens, spirits of the kinless dead, and spirits of people who died with wrongs unredressed may be called 'evil' without thought of deviation from the tribal line of duty, there are other spirits, so the Bantu say, that are conspicuous for moral depravity. Murderers and witches who were put to death for their misdeeds, and suicides,<sup>429</sup> retain their evil propensities with strange persistence. These malevolent spirits are said to be excluded from the underworld; to haunt the places where they met their fate; to spoil the sport of the hunter or fisher who invades their lair; to lead passing travellers astray; to cause accidents and diseases; and to be always on the watch for a chance of once more marrying the harmony of life by usurping the throne of some poor mortal's personality, or of sneaking back into the flesh through a gravid womb.<sup>430</sup> The efforts that are

<sup>428</sup> Discarnate spirits of quarrelsome relatives are quarrelsome still; but they can be dealt with. (RSZ. 152.)

<sup>429</sup> Suicide is held in abhorrence by most Bantu tribes. (Cf. SB. 70, and my pp. 14, 30, 157.) In Busoga the corpse of a suicide was thrown out on waste land instead of being buried. "Should the deed have been done by hanging on a tree, the tree was cut down, cast on to waste land near the body and burned. A house which was the scene of a suicide was also destroyed by fire. The idea evidently was to dislodge the ghost from the place lest others might be induced to commit the same crime." (GS. 103f.) The incident mentioned in SB. 208 is not enough to vitiate the above conclusion. Mathibe, foiled at every point and left with a few disgruntled satellites, called for his medicine-kit, shut himself up in his hut, and was found dead an hour or two later; but nobody knew how he met his fate. Some tribesmen doubted the suicide story; but his death was such a relief that nobody cared how it happened. He was certainly buried. The attitude of this tribe towards suicide is, however, sufficiently shown by their aphorism: *Moipolai ga a lelelwe* ("A suicide is not mourned for"), which means that full mortuary honours are denied him.

<sup>430</sup> In the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, so Cardinall writes (NTG. 27), "some men assert that often a woman who gathers herself a new dress, i. e. leaves, from a bush that is inhabited by a devil seizes the devil together with the leaves, and in this way he has intercourse with her, with the result that a devil-child is born, i. e. a deformed baby." Cardinall postulated 'intercourse' because his imagination was curbed by his knowledge of physiology; but Africans make no doubt that a spirit can enter the body by any aperture and find its way into the gravid womb. And this notion is not peculiar to Africa. Among the Palaungs of the Northern Shan States of Burma, "the spirit inhabiting men and animals is called the *kar-bu*." "The *kar-bu* generally hopes to be reborn into the home that it still remembers, but it may happen that there is no woman there of an age to have another child, so the poor *kar-bu* wanders away seeking a new home and a new mother. For this task it is allowed only seven days."

made to do away with them by burning their bodies do not quite banish the tribesman's dread; for after the pyre has burnt itself out some fragment is often left to link them to earth.<sup>431</sup>

It is hard to pick one's way through the bog of tradition in which Bantu evil spirits dwell. Many tribal domains were encumbered with graves and ghosts before the Bantu acquired them, and have since passed from one tribe to another, growing new ghosts with each succeeding group of settlers, and transforming respectable home-grown ghosts into terrors for strangers. If it is true that ghosts are engendered by the play of fancy upon fact, or what is taken for fact, it is likely that each of those evil spirits took its original name, shape, and character from some event that is traditionally associated with the spot that it haunts; but traditions, like coins, lose legibility with centuries of circulation, so that tribesmen are often at a loss to read their meaning. Neither the shape nor the size of a ghost is any indication of its origin; for all discarnate spirits are said to be small and to suit their shape to the occasion. What looks like a small creature of the burrow or the bush<sup>432</sup> may therefore be the ghost of an irreproachable tribesman or a consummate rogue, or it may be an ensnared soul that some witch is using as a cat's-paw, or even a living witch who has shape-shifted for the easier achievement of some bit of midnight knavery. Nor is their origin any more clearly indicated by their names.<sup>433</sup> They are all

When the *kar-bu* has chosen its next mother and eaten of the fruit of forgetfulness, it alights on the food that she is eating and is swallowed along with it. (Milne: *Home of an Eastern Clan*, pp. 336-39.) St. Gregory the Great was a pope and a very learned man; "yet he solemnly relates that a nun, having eaten some lettuce without making the sign of the cross, swallowed a devil, and that, when commanded by a holy man to come forth, the devil replied: 'How am I to blame? I was sitting on the lettuce, and the woman not having made the sign of the cross, ate me along with it.'" (WSTC. ii. 101.)

<sup>431</sup> This paragraph should be compared with SB. 24f., 26f., 30, 46n., 70, 389f., 429n.; my pp. 14, 29ff., 151; and ACC. 263. Similar notions appear in ancient literature: see SCD. 27f., 36, 93f., 206.

<sup>432</sup> "A Kamba story tells of two girls who took shelter in a cave during a storm. A centipede came in while they were there and the girls threw it outside. But the centipede was an evil spirit and revenged itself by closing up the entrance to the cave." (BBM. 23.)

<sup>433</sup> To the Bakongo mind, the word *ndoki* is redolent of the spirit of witchcraft, which all Bantu regard as the culmination of evil. (APB. 276; WBT. 146.) In the Masai tongue, *en-doki* (pl. *in-dokitin*) means 'the thing'. (Hollis: *The Masai*, pp. 16, 25.) The Bakongo are Bantu; and the Masai are not, though they live on the Bantu border; but is there any connection between the two words,

human, apparently;<sup>434</sup> and the most stable thing about them seems to be their character, though that may change with their relation to the observer.

This notion of earthbound spirits of wicked people who are bent on coming back into human life that they may ruin it, is the nearest approach that the Bantu have made to our theory of evil spirits;<sup>435</sup> but it is very different from our notion of the Devil and his attendants.

The origin of the Devil, like that of other ancient divinities,<sup>436</sup> good and bad, is hidden beneath a tantalizing haze. He came to maturity in the dualistic religion of Persia and Babylonia; but nobody knows whether it was Aryan or Semitic fancy that spawned him. The Magi (Wise Men of the Mazda religion) taught that two primeval powers, Ahuramazda and Ahriman, were engaged in a perpetual struggle for possession of the human soul. Ahuramazda was the god of light, life, law, order, truth, purity, and goodness, who dwelt in the brilliant sky; and Ahriman was the god of darkness, death, disorder, lies, and filth, who lurked in the gloom of hell. Pre-exilic Hebrew religion tried to avoid dualism by making Satan a created and subordinate spirit who had been told off to test the doubtful and punish the guilty; but after the exile, if not before, the Jews considered Satan to be the superhuman and personal ruler of the realm of evil, the arch-enemy of God and all that is good, the tempter and spoiler of mankind, the originator and instigator of all the wrongdoing in the world and all the ruin that follows in its train; and they supposed that he had a retinue of devils, kindred but inferior spirits, at his beck and call, and kept them busy demoralizing mankind. It was this figment of imagination that our ancestors took over and fostered, giving him his Semitic name, Satan, on formal occasions and calling him the Devil in common speech.

In the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, while Europe was making acquaintance with Africa, the Devil came to the front in

or is it a mere similarity of sound? The Bantu prefer to use a periphrasis when they must mention a fearsome creature. (See my p. 241.)

<sup>434</sup> Cf. GPNR. 85; RP. 106; OTB. 196; AK. 89.

<sup>435</sup> Cf. NBCA. 61.

<sup>436</sup> 'Devil' comes from the same Aryan root as the Latin *divus* and *deus* and the English *divine*.

European gossip. It was the time of the witchcraft epidemic; and the weird tales of midnight orgies with the Devil that some witches told in open court were luscious morsels for news-mongers. Recent researches<sup>437</sup> show that these witches belonged to a resuscitated pagan fertility cult that held midnight meetings under Grand Masters, who performed lewd fertility rites in the guise of a dog or a cat or a goat or a bull. The Grand Master of an assembly played the part of its divinity, exacted servile submission from all its members, and guided them in their nefarious schemes; and since Christianity, like other dominant religions, had made devils of the discredited divinities of the past,<sup>438</sup> the initiates called their own particular divinity 'the Devil' without more ado. It was this functionary that the witches had in mind when they confessed that they had had intercourse with the Devil and owed their success to him; but both Romanists and Protestants of that age were convinced that the Devil was a grim reality, and so the term that the witches used was taken at face value by common consent. Mariners and merchants who had been born and bred in that atmosphere could hardly do anything else than jump to the conclusion that the wild fertility-rites that they found in Africa were neither more nor less than the Devil-worship that they had heard of at home.<sup>439</sup> They were right, in a way: all these unchaste rites are built on the same magical conception of life; but 'Devil-worship' was an unfortunate name for the European rites, and quite a misnomer for those that the Bantu had practised for ages before they ever heard of the Devil.<sup>440</sup>

The only discipline that can reveal the meaning of European witch-cults and African paganism is that of comparative science; but that method was not applied to the study of fossils, anatomy, and philology till the 18th century, and the 19th had begun before it was introduced into the study of religion. People who lived before then had no way of finding out what the rites of

<sup>437</sup> WCWE is the best study of this epidemic that I know.

<sup>438</sup> See SB. 402f.

<sup>439</sup> See SB. 318f., 337.

<sup>440</sup> Kaang, of Bushman folklore, is credited with some of the functions that we usually ascribe to the Devil (See my p. 18n.); but nothing is known of his origin. He may have been a Bushman of note before he became the grisly captain of the Bushman underworld; but there is much in Bushman language and religion that is foreign to the Bantu, and there seems to be no Bantu equivalent for Kaang.

the witch-cults were, or whence they came, or why they were performed, or what the pagan practices of Africa stood for; and these old pioneers are therefore not to blame for their mistake.

But what shall we say of recent writers who maintain that pagan Africans, especially those of the West Coast, believe in the existence of the Devil? Claridge came to the conclusion that the common European conception of the Devil is contained in the Bakongo phrase *Nkadi a Mpemba*, and that the Bakongo cherish the delusion, once common in Europe, that a man becomes a wizard by placing his soul at the disposal of this mythical monster.<sup>441</sup> Weeks "avoided the use of the word devil as a translation of this name as it connotes too much in our language;" but he stated, nevertheless, that "*Nkadi a Mpemba* is thought to be the source and fount of all evil, and it is said that it lives with the witches (*ndoki*), and that all the witchcraft really comes from this power."<sup>442</sup> Must we say that these writers also were mistaken? Probably not. The Bakongo now make common use of maize, manioc, tobacco, sugar cane, chili peppers, domestic pigs, and a dozen other things of economic value that the Portuguese brought from foreign parts; and they are just as likely to make common use of foreign products of imagination that were acclimatized at the same time as foreign products of the soil. The Portuguese were great propagandists; all their early expeditions contained priests; and when Diego Cam brought many priests to San Salvador in 1491, the Devil was an important adjunct of the faith that they propagated with fervour and success. They were hard put to it to find a suitable vernacular word for 'Devil', because that notion was as yet foreign to Bantu thought; but, casting about for some terrorizing figment of Bakongo fancy that could be charged with this new meaning, they found that the Bakongo, like all Bantu tribes, thought witchcraft the very culmination of iniquity, and that *Nkadi a Mpemba* could be made to carry many of their notions of the Devil. The new notions, however, did not quite displace the old. Weeks found that *Nkadi a Mpemba* and *ndoki* were still interchangeable terms in some districts; and Claridge was told that "originally

<sup>441</sup> WBT. 147ff.

<sup>442</sup> APB. 276f.



the word used to denote the worst kind of evil spirit known to, or imagined by the native mind was *ndoki*, which means wizard or witch.<sup>1443</sup> A similar process has been going on in parts of Africa where the Roman Church was never dominant; for Protestants find the Devil a very present help in some of their intellectual troubles.

Something should be said, too, about the assumption that pagan Africans think as we do about the Devil, and angels, and creation, and God. Merchants, missionaries, and officials who show forth the justice and lovingkindness of God in their dealings with Africans are rendering the best service that one race can bestow upon another; but they cannot find their way about in the wilderness of African thought till they have studied the history of religion. Even the art of thinking in an African vernacular is not enough; a White man may think in the Black Man's tongue and yet be very far from thinking the Black Man's thoughts.

Whether the Bantu may be said to worship spirits that they deem evil depends upon what is meant by that much misused word 'worship'. They blarney them, no doubt, bribe them, bind them with strong spells, and sometimes try to destroy them;<sup>444</sup> but worshipping is not wheedling, nor is it spellbinding. Worship is an attempt to enter into friendly communion with a supernatural person; and there is no evidence that the Bantu ever desire the companionship of evil spirits. It may be that Bantu witches and wizards do;<sup>445</sup> but we know nothing of their esoteric practices except what their enemies tell us. The distinction between rites of tendance and rites of riddance that Miss Harri-

<sup>443</sup> Johnston, having mentioned a malign spirit that the Bayaka call *moloki*, added this footnote: "*-loki, -doki, -loshi, -lozi, -loi*, in varying forms, is a widespread Bantu root . . . for an evil spirit or the evil spirit. The word is consequently associated with 'witchcraft', 'wizard', and other associations of spiritual evil." (GGC. 636n.) I think this is putting the cart before the horse. This root is much associated with the idea of evil, because it denotes witchcraft, and witchcraft is regarded as the height of iniquity.

<sup>444</sup> Weeks says that the Bakongo think it necessary to have an expert "who can control, punish and even destroy" evil spirits (*nkwiya*) that cause disease, bad luck, and death (APB. 223); that one of these experts "put small packets of native red peppers on all the roads leading to the town, as all evilly-disposed spirits have a great horror of red pepper, and will not come near it" (APB. 243); and that *Nkadi a Mpemba* "can be soothed, appeased and helpful to those who know how to deal with it" (APB. 276).

<sup>445</sup> Sheane thought that the Awemba regard *vibanda* as evil spirits of bad men who roam about the earth, "wreaking vengeance on all those who do not

son draws in her *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, is right enough in theory, but often impossible of application to particular cases. If Bantu tribesmen fall into the power of a tyrant that they hate and dare not defy, they take to cunning, which is the weapon of the weak, beguiling him with flattery and eye-service till they can escape from his clutches. Discarnate tyrants are treated after the same manner; being unaware of man's unuttered desires, as all spirits are supposed to be, they are hoodwinked with rites of tendance by hapless mortals whose only desire is to be rid of them forever. This hypocrisy wears the semblance of unabashed traffic with evil spirits; but it is not devil-worship; if it is devil-anything, it is devil-dodging. Talbot draws attention to a noticeable and noteworthy peculiarity in some rites rendered to evil spirits. In Nigeria, he tells us,<sup>446</sup> sacrifices that are offered to earthbound spirits of bad men who were thrown into the 'bad bush' without mortuary honours are left untasted, while those to the honoured dead are shared by the worshippers. This is a pretty clear indication that the former are a sort of spiritual blackmail, while the latter aim at communion. In minor rites of approach, however, the difference is in the heart of the operator, not in the operation.<sup>447</sup>

The stories of Blunderbore, Cormoran, and other man-eating giants that used to thrill British youngsters have dropped out of favour, together with the tallow candle, the ingle-nook, and the flickering flame from a faggot on the open hearth that gave them an appropriate setting. What was the origin of these strange old stories? Were they literary bastards, engendered by the play of Celtic gods upon the popular imagination? "One mark of the Celtic gods is their great stature. No house could contain Bran, and certain divine people of Elysium who appeared to Fion had rings 'as thick as a three-ox goad'. Even the Fians are giants, and the skull of one of them could contain several

worship them or emulate their ill deeds". He had heard "many stories of men meeting a *Chiwanda* on the way, and being enticed into a thicket, murdered and eaten by the same evil spirit, who reverts to the ghoulish banquets, which he enjoyed during his earthly life as a *waloshi*". His wrong use of the plural must be set down to a slip of the pen. He was of opinion, however, that "only the *waloshi* (sorcerers) worship the *chiwanda*." (JRAL, 1906, p. 153.)

<sup>446</sup> SN. ii. 319ff.

<sup>447</sup> Opinions expressed in this paragraph find support in SB. 26f. and in my pp. 29-32, 109.

men.<sup>448</sup> African ogres still prowl round freely in the borderland of magico-religious traditions; and they, too, are brawny and brainless ruffians who can be bested by a shrimp of a boy that has both sense and pluck. They are all cannibals, though different tribes give them different forms and different names. Naughty Becwana boys are warned that if they continue to wander in forbidden ways, *Dimwe*, *Dzimwe*, or *Ledimo-le-ya-batho*<sup>449</sup> will snap them up and put them in his great bag, with other titbits for his cooking-pot. The Masai bogy is said to be half man and half lion;<sup>450</sup> and that of the Nandi is described as half man and half bird, with only one leg,<sup>451</sup> but nine buttocks, and a red mouth that shines at night like a lamp.<sup>452</sup> They are both cannibals. Nobody knows whether these African bugbears owe their existence wholly to the fertility of human imagination or partly to exaggerated racial recollections of men of bigger build and cannibalistic habits; but there can be no doubt that they owe their immortality to the tales, charged with terror and pathos, that have gathered round them; and if they ever had any religious significance, they lost it long ago. When a European writer calls them 'devils', it must be attributed either to the pooriness of his vocabulary or to his incomprehension of antiquated religious notions.

<sup>448</sup> RAC. 158.

<sup>449</sup> These different names for the same bogy are all built upon *-dimo* ('discarnate human spirit'): see SB. 10f., 66ff.

<sup>450</sup> Hollis: *The Masai*, p. 265.

<sup>451</sup> Cf. my pp. 38, 69, 71, 74.

<sup>452</sup> Hollis: *The Nandi*, p. 41.

## CHAPTER II.

### TABOO

#### ANIMISM INTERTWINED WITH ANCESTOR-WORSHIP

**T**HAT animism was a feature of human thought at a very early period in the history of man, is indicated by the fact that its vestigial remains are found in the popular forms of every religion, even of Christianity. But it is enough for our present purpose to advance the perfectly safe proposition that both animism and ancestor-worship are older than the Bantu race, and that that race has been nurtured in both practices from its infancy. Ancestor-worship is not an intolerant or exclusive religion; it does not forbid its votaries to worship other gods, or to rely upon the aid of other spirits. Great as it is in the estimation of its adherents, ancestor-worship is not able to still all their fears, or to satisfy all their longings; and animism comes in as a supplementary faith. In Bantu daily life animism is more conspicuous than ancestor-worship; but its influence, though quite as extensive, does not penetrate to the roots of Bantu social institutions as decidedly as ancestor-worship does. A superficial and uneducated observer might spend many months with some South African tribes without discovering that they were ancestor-worshippers, for the rites of that religion are by no means obtrusive; but if he were an observer at all, he could hardly spend a week in any of these communities without noticing such manifest marks of animism as amulets and taboos. Just what marks of animism he would find most evident would depend upon the custom of the tribe with which he became familiar; for it is curiously true that animistic practices which are in high favour with one tribe may be unusual in a contiguous community. For example, a missionary<sup>453</sup> who travelled to Matabeleland, spending a few months in Bechuanaland on the way, wrote in 1879 that amulets and charms on the person were much less common among the Mata-

<sup>453</sup> Rev. Joseph Cockin.

bele than among the *Bakwena* and *Bamangwato*, while witchcraft was much more prevalent, there being few days when there was not an execution for witchcraft among the *Matabele*. He remarked, also, that the *Matabele* did not understand the use of divining-tablets, although they trusted implicitly in the use of these tablets by the *Mashona*, whom they had conquered and enslaved.

#### TABOO

Bantu taboos are so numerous that one cannot pretend to give an exhaustive list of them; the most that can be done here is to consider a few characteristic examples. We shall have to group these samples for the sake of our own thinking, but must carefully avoid the suggestion that there is any such grouping in Bantu thought, or that we have discovered a satisfactory classification of taboos. The only justification for the classification here adopted, is that it is convenient.

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO FOOD

Men of the Zulu and some other tribes sometimes dream of spirits who lay them under food-taboos when they are about to become diviners;<sup>454</sup> and we shall find many instances in which certain foods are taboo to certain people under certain conditions.<sup>455</sup> But some foods are taboo to all the people of a community all the time. The flesh of the species of animal which happens to be the totem of a clan is always taboo to the clansmen, except in a few cases where the totem has degenerated into little more than a surname and a symbol. Shooter tells us<sup>456</sup> that the Zulus of his time did not eat fish, crocodiles, serpents, monkeys, hyenas, zebras, rhinoceroses, gnus, hartebeestes, elands, ducks, paaus, fowls nor eggs; that porcupines were eaten only by young people; and that old Zulu warriors abstained from wild pigs, elephants, and hippopotami. Fish, crocodiles, serpents, hyenas, and pigs are taboo in a large number of Bantu tribes; but river-dwellers and tribes around the Great Lakes regard fish as a staple article

<sup>454</sup> RSZ, 133.

<sup>455</sup> See pp. 124n., 128, 133, etc.

<sup>456</sup> KNZC. 215.

of food; and pigs are far from taboo on the West Coast. The Abangoni do not eat fish; they say fish are like snakes.<sup>461</sup> Dugald Campbell says<sup>462</sup> that the bushpig, bushbuck and zebra are taboo to the Wemba, and that the Yeke tribe will not eat zebra or fish, giving as their reason for the latter taboo that fish is slippery and sickly food. He suggests that the main reason for the Yeke fish-taboo is to be found in the fact that they were plain-dwellers at the north end of Tanganyika, where fish were unobtainable. The same reason has been given for the fish-taboo which prevails among Becwana; but it is not convincing. Zebras are denizens of the plains, and bushpigs are often plentiful in the territory of a tribe to which pork is taboo. The Becwana say that they do not eat fish, because fishes are the younger brothers of crocodiles, and the crocodile is the totem of one of their most ancient clans. Bantu doctors use technical terms in prescribing common substances; and in the esoteric language of Becwana practitioners the crocodile is known as 'fish of the waters.' The probability is that animals whose flesh is taboo to whole communities are in some way connected with present or past clan-totems, except in such cases as bushpigs and hyenas—animals which are avoided because they are known to feed on corpses.

Rowley found<sup>463</sup> that the Manganja did not eat eggs, and seemed to have a superstition about it; but he does not tell us what that superstition was. Macdonald remarks<sup>464</sup> that young Wayao people would not eat eggs, "because it would make them barren." Stirke says the same of unmarried women in Barotse-land.<sup>465</sup> In Buganda and in Busoga men may eat both fowls and eggs, but women are not supposed to eat either.<sup>466</sup> The eating of raw eggs is tabooed by all the Boloki people, and the breaker of this taboo is not allowed to eat with his family for a few days; but they may eat well-cooked eggs, no matter how unsavory through age.<sup>467</sup> Eggs are taboo to women and girls in many Bantu

<sup>461</sup> AA. 28.

<sup>462</sup> IHB. 91.

<sup>463</sup> UMCA. 174.

<sup>464</sup> A. i. 27. Cf. SRK. 127.

<sup>465</sup> BRT. 76.

<sup>466</sup> Bg. 423f. GS. 113.

<sup>467</sup> ACC. 296-97.

tribes, for some reason or other. "The ancient Britons abstained from eating eggs, on the principle that it was impious to destroy the vital principle in embryo;<sup>464</sup> but I never found a hint of that reason in the talk of any of my Bantu instructors. I have usually been told that there is an aphrodisiac quality in eggs, which makes it indelicate for women and girls to eat them. Eggs figured at the spring festivals of the Cyprian Venus and the Babylonian Astarte, in the orgies of Bacchus, and in the Dionysian and other mysteries. It is not surprising that the Bantu should attribute aphrodisiac properties to eggs; but, in view of the known fondness of these people for charms to promote love and fecundity, one hardly expects to have this put forward as a reason why eggs should be taboo to women and girls, and in a few tribes to men.

Transkeian tribes never eat fish; and the men do not eat wild pigs, hares, ducks or geese, or domestic fowls, but the women do.<sup>465</sup> Domestic fowls were taboo to men of the Wanyamwezi when I was there in 1882-3; but the women were rather fond of them.

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO MENSTRUATION

The mysterious life-processes of menstruation, coition, pregnancy, child-birth, and death, are all hedged round with taboos. What Smith says<sup>466</sup> about the taboos of menstruation is almost sufficient for our purpose. "No menstruating woman may tend a fire or carry water or food." "She is a dangerous woman and must be separated as far as possible from contact with her fellows." "She is spoken of euphemistically as being 'in retreat' and 'having no hands.'" "She may not enter a hut in which people are sitting who have 'eaten medicine'; if she must enter they have first to come out. It is taboo for her to eat in company. Were she to eat in company with a man he would lose his virility. If he went from that place and started to run, he would have something burst within his chest and would die. . . . She may not sit near people, lest there should be mutual injury . . . She must have nothing to do with the common fire, but

<sup>464</sup> CPP. 451.

<sup>465</sup> LA. 171.

<sup>466</sup> IPNR. i. 142., ii. 27., cf. also Bg. 95-6.

must light one for her own use. She must not handle other people's pots nor eat out of their basins, nor drink out of their cups, nor smoke their pipes. She may not cook food for anybody, nor draw water for another. If she sleeps in her hut, it must be on the floor. She may not enter a village other than her own. For five days she is *tonda* [taboo]; then she washes and may rejoin her fellows."

Smith is speaking of Baila customs; but with minor modifications or additions these taboos prevail in all Bantu tribes. At such periods of a woman's life no one may take anything from her hand, or step upon her sleeping-mat, though, strange to say, if she places anything upon the ground for you, you may take it with safety; and she must on no account enter the hut of an invalid. Some tribes believe that her shadow would blight chickens, pups, or any young domestic animals.

A woman of the Akamba "during her menstrual period may not grind corn, but is allowed to cook sweet potatoes or whole maize. She may not, however, milk the cattle, nor may she cut potato tops as green fodder for the goats."<sup>467a</sup> Very few pastoral Bantu tribes allow women to milk cows at any time; it is taboo for them to enter the cattle-pen of any but blood relatives, or even of these during menstruation or after abortion. During the menstrual period she may not even touch the calabash or the sack in which milk is stored. In Uganda it is taboo for a woman to drink milk during this period.<sup>467b</sup>

There seems to be some mysterious danger associated with woman from puberty to the menopause, though before and after these years of her life she is unaffected by sex-taboos. She must never enter a sheep-pen, nor pass through a flock of sheep, or there would be serious mortality in the flock; the Kafirs say she must even avoid paths by which sheep are wont to pass.<sup>468</sup> Goats are unaffected, apparently; though the Akamba prohibition given above is noteworthy.

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO COHABITATION

The Bahuma of Ankole (pastoral Hamites) forbid any married person to drink the milk of a cow that has calved within

<sup>467a</sup> BBM. 161.

<sup>467b</sup> Bg. 419.

<sup>468</sup> See also SB. 346.



two or three days, believing that if such milk is drunk by any but young boys the cow will cease to give milk and the calf will die.<sup>469</sup>

Magic and iron-working are closely associated in Bantu thought.<sup>470</sup> An elaborate ritual precedes the digging of the ore, the smelting of the ore, and the subsequent smithing of the metal. The smelters of Bunyoro do their work in the hills; and "during this time they do not like men to visit them, and a woman may on no account enter the camp. Their wives bring them food, but must leave it somewhere near, and never attempt to come in, for their presence would be disastrous to the success of the work."<sup>471</sup> The Bambala smelters of iron ore are in a state of strict taboo during the time they sojourn in the smelting camp. "If one wishes to visit the village, he must on no account have connection with his wife. He may not enter his house—in particular he may not sit on his bed—but squat down at the door, where, if his wife cooks his food, he must eat it. And the women staying in the village may not wash, nor anoint themselves, nor put on any ornaments that would attract the men. Should a man transgress by having intercourse with his wife or any other woman, they say the smelting would be a failure. . . . The doctor himself "(who presides over the operations)" is taboo. He has nothing to do with his wives or any other women during the time of the operations. The doctor may not cut his hair nor be shaved all the time. No menstruating woman may come

<sup>469</sup> SCA. 92. People who are living the sexual life are forbidden to drink beestings among the pastoral Bantu, and for a similar reason; but many tribes allow little girls as well as boys to drink it. The Baganda not only forbid a cow to be milked during the first four days after it has calved, but forbid its owner's wife to cultivate gardens during that period. Bg. 418. In Busoga the milk of a cow that has calved is taboo, except to boys (presumably boys who are too young for sexual commerce), till the umbilical cord drops from the calf. GS. 110. The Dorobo (who call themselves Asi) are said to be an aboriginal race of hunters (whatever 'aboriginal' may mean) who inhabit the great forests of the Kikuyu escarpment. Some of their customs differ considerably from those of the Bantu, but they have an analogous taboo. They hang beehives in trees, as some Bantu tribes do, and "the first crop of honey out of a new hive is eaten only by the children of the village, or by very old women. The reason of this is said to be that if a young woman were to eat any and then misconduct herself with a man, the honey crop would be spoiled and the bees would not enter any of the hives hung up that day." BBM. 253.

<sup>470</sup> See RAC. 76. for similar notions among the pagan Celts.

<sup>471</sup> SCA. 163.; see also my SB. 202.

near the camp."<sup>472</sup> And yet many of the songs sung during the smelting are positively obscene, though they seem to be almost a part of the ritual.

An Akamba woman, after planting her garden, "must not cohabit with her husband till the grain has sprouted and appeared above ground. Should, however, ceremonial cohabitation become necessary in connection with some other religious observance, the woman must first go and dig up a seed of each species of food product which has been planted and bring it back to the village."<sup>473</sup> And in the same tribe, "a housewife having gathered into her granary all her crops, must not cohabit with her husband the night on which she has completed her harvest."<sup>474</sup> When Akamba have built a bush-fence around the site selected for a new village, the head of the village and his family camp on the spot while cutting poles and grass for their huts. "On the second night and the fourth night of this preliminary occupation, the head of the village must cohabit with his wife." The head of the village builds his house first and takes formal possession of it as soon as the framework is complete and a little grass laid on the roof. "On the second night of the occupation of the house the husband must cohabit with his wife, but not until the second night."<sup>475</sup> "For two days after the death of a person the men of the village are not allowed to cohabit with their wives. On the third day the father of the deceased cohabits with the mother of the deceased and then both father and mother shave their heads, and the people of the village rub their feet in the contents of a goat's stomach, which is a purification ceremony. After this the remainder of the village may resume their normal sexual relationships."<sup>476</sup>

From various pages in IPNR. we gather that a Mwila woman must abstain from sexual intercourse while making beer, or the beer would refuse to ferment, and just before sowing her fields, or the seed would not sprout; that people who thresh out the grain, and also those who store it away in bins, have to abstain

<sup>472</sup> IPNR. i. 202-210.

<sup>473</sup> BBM. 76.

<sup>474</sup> BBM. 75.

<sup>475</sup> AK. 58-59.

<sup>476</sup> AK. 67. See also p. 139.

the night before they commence the work; that a man must keep away from his wife and all other women the night before he starts on a journey, or he will meet with bad luck on the road; that men must abstain the night before they go to fish or to dig game-pits; and that men going to war must abstain from the time the doctors begin to prepare the army.

"Strict celibacy must be observed" by the Akikuyu "the night before they go to sacrifice" (to Engai) "and the night after. The night before the sacrifice they sleep in their usual huts, but the night after they sleep in the goat hut. The morning following the sacrifice they go and bathe in a river and then resume their ordinary life. A departure from this rule of celibacy by anyone present will entirely spoil the efficacy of the sacrifice."<sup>477</sup>

Junod mentions<sup>478</sup> that the Thonga prohibit sexual relations while there is a case of serious illness in the village; while there is an epidemic raging there; during the four or five days while the villagers are performing the greater acts of mourning after the death of one of their number; during the moving of their village to a new site; during certain hunting and fishing operations; and while certain religious ceremonies are being observed.

Becwana tribes hold it to be of the utmost importance to the recovery of an invalid that his nurses should abstain from all sexual intercourse, whether licit or illicit, as long as they continue to wait upon him. The mere presence of an adulterer or adulteress in a sick room is dangerous to an invalid; and if a woman were to visit her paramour in his sickness, or even permit him to hear her voice in the distance, he would suffer a relapse, and probably die. A man who has lent his wife to a friend is tabooed from visiting that friend in sickness, or speaking within earshot of the invalid, or attending his funeral. Notwithstanding the fact that the Boys' Puberty Rites last for nearly three months, and are followed after the interval of a week or two by the Girls' Puberty Rites, the Becwana assert that cohabitation used to be taboo to the whole town while these Rites were being performed. This prohibition has long fallen into disuse; and those of us who know something of the incontinence of these people find it difficult to believe that it was ever observed. Sexual intercourse is,

<sup>477</sup> BBM. 42.

<sup>478</sup> LSAT. ii. 336. & 57.

however, still taboo for those who are taking any part in the Puberty Rites; and it is believed that violation of the taboo would be followed by great fatality among the neophytes.

In a polygamous society which glorifies concupiscence and demands coition as essential to some legal and religious rites, one hardly expects to find such taboos as these;<sup>479</sup> and they are the more noteworthy in that they apply to all sexual intercourse, licit and illicit alike.

Bantu taboos of cohabitation appear to be grounded in the conviction that seminal fluid is in itself a source of magical peril. This notion is more clearly seen in another Bantu taboo: among the Becwana a man who has an emission in his sleep is thereby ceremonially unclean and must bathe his whole body (by no means a daily habit) before associating with his neighbors. I have not heard of this taboo in other tribes; but I suspect that it is not uncommon in magically-minded communities. It is mentioned in *Deuteronomy*;<sup>480</sup> and in two of the nine questions concerning discipline that Augustine, on being ordained archbishop of the English nation, submitted to Pope Gregory. The last clause in Question VIII. reads: "Whether a man, having had intercourse with his wife, may enter a church before he is washed with water, or approach the mystery of holy communion?" And Question IX. runs: "If after the illusion which is wont to happen in a dream, a man may receive the body of the Lord; or, if he be a priest, celebrate the sacred mysteries?"<sup>481</sup>

<sup>479</sup> "We find that among the Arabs sexual intercourse was forbidden to pilgrims to Mecca. The same rule obtained among the Minaeans in connection with the sacred office of collecting frankincense (Pliny, H. N. xii. 54). Among the Hebrews we find the restriction in connection with the theophany at Sinai (Ex. xix. 15) and the use of consecrated bread (1 Sam. xxi. 5); Sozomen, ii. 4, attests it for the heathen feast at Mamre; and Herodotus himself tells us that among the Babylonians and Arabs every conjugal act was immediately followed, not only by an ablution, but by such a fumigation as is still practised in the Sudan (Herod. i. 198). This restriction is not directed against immorality, for it applies to spouses; nor does it spring from asceticism, for the temples of the Semitic deities were thronged with sacred prostitutes; who, however, were careful to retire with their partners outside the sacred precincts. The extension of this kind of taboo to warriors on an expedition is common among rude peoples and we know that it had place among the Arabs, and was not wholly obsolete as late as the second century of Islam. . . . That the taboo on sexual intercourse applied to warriors in old Israel cannot be positively affirmed, but is probable from Deut. xxiii. 10-15 compared with 1 Sam. xxi. 5, 6 (E. V. 4, 5); 2 Sam. xi. 11." (RS. 454-55)

<sup>480</sup> Deut. xxiii. 10f.

<sup>481</sup> Bede: Eccles. Hist., Bk. i., Chap. xxvii., Q. viii. & ix.

## TABOOS PERTAINING TO PREGNANCY

Illicit intercourse with a pregnant woman is a taboo of which Bantu libertines stand in awe; and some tribes prohibit intercourse between husband and wife after quickening. But pregnancy is fenced about with a profusion of taboos that are not so easy to understand.

A pregnant woman must not eat milk, beans, potatoes, some sorts of pumpkins, certain parts of a slaughtered animal, such as entrails or marrow, or any food that was cooked on the previous day. She must not drink while standing; nor turn back when going out of a hut.<sup>482</sup> Among some tribes, as among the Lumbu, she must not pass through other people's villages; nor allow her shadow to fall upon other people's fruit, chickens, pups, or other young things; nor look upon a newborn babe;<sup>483</sup> nor sit upon the chair or bed of married people; nor visit the threshing-floor; nor drink strong beer, unless she has borne several children, and not even then if pregnancy be far advanced. Among the Thonga, she must not be saluted when anyone departs. She must not sow grain, nor walk over land that has been recently planted, or the grain would not ripen. Some tribes extend this taboo to her husband, while others limit it to land planted with ground-nuts or beans. The charms with which the Bantu give fertility to their gardens are credited with great potency, as we shall see later; but the mysterious influence which emanates from a pregnant woman would spoil the charm if she walked over the sown seed. What is the explanation? Is it a case of 'like cures like'; or is it that the fertility of the woman is so over-powering that it attracts to itself all the fertility that the charm would otherwise bestow upon the seed? The Becwana say that such a woman must not sow *another person's* garden; but in an emergency she may 'unchoke' the seed before sowing it, by merely breathing on it, and then it will be safe. Here again questions arise. Does her breath restore to the seed the fertility that she had monopolized by her presence? A pregnant woman must not enter a hut in which there has been a recent birth, nor any

<sup>482</sup> SRK. 106.

<sup>483</sup> "In the East Riding of Yorkshire . . . If a woman who is about to become a mother were to act as a godmother at a baptism, the child for which she stood would soon die." (CFL. 108)

sick-room, not even that of her own husband. Nevertheless, if a sick husband wishes very much to see his wife when she is in that interesting condition, the magician will make a mixture of powdered charcoal, fat, and a little of the woman's urine, and anoint him with it; and after that she may safely enter. During the months of gestation the woman must avoid everything crossed in her clothing, as, for instance, the tapes of her garments; and she must not look upon a corpse, nor upon anything that is abnormal or uncanny.

Some of these taboos are binding upon the husband of the pregnant woman, also.<sup>484</sup> For example, many tribes forbid him to visit the sick during the months of his wife's gestation. There are, however, special taboos which apply to the husband. He must not hunt the lion, leopard or elephant during these months; or the animal will be fierce, and the spears of the hunters will merely graze its skin so long as that man remains in the hunting-party. The Becwana say that an elephant will single out a man whose wife is pregnant, and will ruthlessly attack him. Strange as such a notion appears to us, it is not out of the beaten track of Bantu thought. For example, the Mashona believe<sup>485</sup> that an elephant can detect an adulterer when it meets him, and that it immediately gives chase; that if the adulterer makes a full confession the elephant will spare him; and that a man whose wife is false to him will also be chased. They urge, therefore, that women should be virtuous so that they may safeguard their husbands from this danger.<sup>486</sup>

A woman who has aborted is a very dangerous person. Her husband will have no intercourse with her till she has had connection with some other man and thus transferred the disease to him; and until she is purified she may not enter another person's hut. Even the buried foetus may give the disease to a person who inadvertently walks over the place where it is buried.<sup>487</sup>

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO CHILDBIRTH

All Bantu tribes observe a puerperal period, or puerperium as it is usually termed, during which the parents and babe are sub-

<sup>484</sup> Cf. ACC. 132.

<sup>485</sup> MLC. 85.

<sup>486</sup> Cf. WPP. 136.

<sup>487</sup> IPNR. i. 234-35. See also WBA. 80.

ject to special taboos. The length of this period varies considerably in different tribes; some tribes make it only a few days, while others prolong it to three months. The seclusion of the lying-in patient is also more rigorous in some communities than in others.

In the Akikuyu tribe:<sup>488</sup> "The hut is placed in seclusion for four days after the birth of a girl, and five days after that of a boy; no one is allowed to enter except the immediate women friends or attendants. The father is not present and does not see the child for a day or two. The mother, however, may be seen sitting or taking short strolls outside. On the fourth or fifth day respectively, purification takes place and the woman is shaved." This varying of the length of the puerperium according to the sex of the babe, is not common among Bantu; but it agrees with the Semitic practice set forth in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Leviticus; and it is noteworthy that the usage occurs in a Bantu tribe which dwells on the borders of Hamite territory.

Nine days after the birth of their babe, Baganda parents eat a common meal which the wife has cooked, and the husband jumps over her legs—an act which is regarded in that country as a ceremonial equivalent for having sexual connection with her.<sup>489</sup> If he has intercourse with other wives before this rite is performed, a child of his will die. Three months after birth the baby is seated in a hole scooped out of the floor and covered with barkcloth; the wife prepares food for her husband and a few friends; and in the evening the husband jumps over the wife to *strengthen the child*. *For three years after childbirth, the wife lives apart from her husband, except that among the peasantry, of whom the great majority are monogamists of necessity, wives resume relations with their husbands after seven days.*<sup>490</sup> In the light of the practice of other Bantu tribes, this looks like a strict puerperium of nine days and a less rigorous seclusion for the remainder of three months, probably till the resumption of the menses.

<sup>488</sup> PP. 147.

<sup>489</sup> Bg. 357. Immediately after his coronation the king jumps over a tusk of ivory, so that there may be an increase of elephants, Bg. 168.

<sup>490</sup> Bg. 55-58.

The Akamba puerperium lasts for twenty days;<sup>491</sup> and the Bakonjo, a small tribe inhabiting the eastern slopes of Mt. Ruwenzori, observed a puerperium of four days for a boy and three for a girl;<sup>492</sup> while that of the Wachaga of Mt. Kilimanjaro is three months.<sup>493</sup> Around Blantyre, in Macdonald's time,<sup>494</sup> the practice was for the mother to leave the village accompanied by one or two female friends and to be confined in the bush; after which she walked home, one of her attendants carrying the new baby. Then mother and child withdrew from society for from three to six days, after which their heads were shaved, the child named, and both welcomed with rejoicing. During the days of seclusion, only the older women of the group were admitted to the lying-in hut. The Baila<sup>495</sup> puerperium lasts for six days at least. The woman's husband and her male relations are permitted to bring her their congratulations; but neither man nor woman may enter her hut if they have had sexual intercourse the night before. In North-east Angola,<sup>496</sup> neither mother nor child may cross the threshold till the baby is three months old, save in special circumstances; then she is released from all taboos of childbirth. The Barotse<sup>497</sup> seclude women for two months after delivery, but permit the husband to see his child two days after it is born. If the child dies, the wife returns to her husband without much delay; if it lives, conjugal relations are resumed about four months after its birth. Transkeian tribes<sup>498</sup> seclude the mother for a month after childbirth, convinced that without this precaution fecundity would cease.

Becwana women are confined for three months after childbirth. Puerperal customs are much the same in all tribes of this group, but, to be precise the following is the Bakwena practice. When a woman's time has come, a kaross is hung out at the gate of her courtyard, and a stick of *morala* or of *mothata* is smeared with 'medicine', placed across the threshold, and kept in position by a pair of pegs at either end. The stick alone would be a

<sup>491</sup> AK. 61.

<sup>492</sup> GS. 142.

<sup>493</sup> K. 199.

<sup>494</sup> A. i. 113-15.

<sup>495</sup> IPNR. ii. 11.

<sup>496</sup> WBT. 99.

<sup>497</sup> BRT. 61.

<sup>498</sup> LA. 153.



quarantine-sign,<sup>499</sup> but the kaross is the unmistakable Yellow-jack of parturition. Attendants upon the parturient are selected with great care; no woman who, to use their euphemism, 'shares the blanket of a man' may be admitted to the lying-in hut during the period of seclusion, nor one who is pregnant or menstruous. All men are excluded, whatever their relationship to the patient. One of the attendants is regarded as the nurse *par excellence*: she brings the invalid her food and eats out of the same dish; and it is of the utmost importance that this woman should be free from every suspicion of 'impurity.' The other attendants have their food served out in other dishes, and must not eat with the patient, nor even wash her dishes. Women about the place who pound corn for the family or fetch firewood or water, are debarred even from entering the courtyard of the lying-in hut. If any of these taboos are violated, the sore left on the infant's navel after the sloughing away of the umbilical cord will refuse to heal. During the mother's puerperium the father is under taboos: he must not enter her hut, nor sleep with any other woman,<sup>500</sup> not even one of his other wives; and this, whether the parturient be his head wife or one of his inferior wives. If he breaks this taboo, when he takes the new-born babe it will lose all strength of mind or body: if the child becomes a noodle, people are sure to remark that 'his father jumped over the stick', alluding to the quarantine-sign at the threshold, but implying that he violated some taboo that he ought to have observed, even though he may not have entered his wife's hut. All these taboos are terminated by a somewhat elaborate ceremony of purification.<sup>501</sup>

The Thonga parturient<sup>502</sup> "is absolutely outside the pale of society" till the umbilical cord has sloughed away, usually about seven days after birth. Then the floor of the hut is smeared with clay; the child is fumigated by the 'doctor' till it cries, sneezes, and coughs, whereupon it is anointed with a mixture of fat and the ashes of the conglomeration with which it was fumigated; and both mother and babe emerge from their confinement. Some

<sup>499</sup> Cf. my pp. 192ff.

<sup>500</sup> Most tribes consider the husband to be free from this latter taboo when the umbilical cord has sloughed away and the sore healed.

<sup>501</sup> See p. 200ff.

<sup>502</sup> LSAT. i. 40-44, 51-52, 54-56.

taboos of childbirth are continued, however, till the mother resumes her menses, which is usually on the third month after delivery among the Thonga, when there is a ceremony of showing the child the moon; and a few taboos remain in force till after the ceremony of tying a cotton cord around the child, which takes place when it begins to crawl, and which is evidently the official reception of the child into the family.

The great events of the puerperium are the sloughing away of the umbilical cord, the cessation of the lochia, and the resumption of the menses; and the period of strict seclusion is probably fixed by the first two events, while the full period of three months is due to the last-mentioned.

Whether the puerperium be long or short, however, the mother and babe, and sometimes the husband, are subject to special taboos till it is completed, while many of the taboos of pregnancy continue in force during this period also. The milk-taboo, which forbids the mother to drink milk<sup>503</sup> is very general among the pastoral tribes. A medical missionary among the Kafirs blames this taboo for increasing infantile mortality, inasmuch as it necessitates hand-feeding of many babies. Claridge states,<sup>504</sup> however, that in his district a mother is not allowed to suckle her child till after the second feast, which releases her from the puerperal taboos, and that during these three months the infant is fed by a wet nurse. In most tribes the mother must not be seen out of her hut till the final purification which terminates the days or months of her seclusion;<sup>505</sup> nor may she be seen *in it by any male, not even by her husband*; and no one may eat food that the mother has prepared during her seclusion.

Some of these taboos are evidently for the sake of the invalid: the presence of a woman who is ceremonially unclean, for example, prevents sleep and makes the patient restless; and when this symptom is observed the attendants are sure to cross-examine one another pitilessly. The woman's husband, also, is liable to

<sup>503</sup> Cf. LSAT. i. 190.

<sup>504</sup> WBT. 98.

<sup>505</sup> "There are parts of England where the neighbours will not allow a woman to enter their house till she has been churched. . . . The feeling that women ought not to leave their own house or garden, for secular purposes, before they have been to church is very widely spread." CFL. 112. Note also that 'confinement' is an English synonym for 'childbirth'.

many pains and penalties if some taboos of this period are violated. But most of these restrictions are for the sake of the feeble life of the babe.

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO CHILDHOOD

Some taboos apply only to children and young people. A babe must not be held by a youth, for it is slippery, and the youth will become slippery on the feet. A child must not be fed with flesh till it has cut its teeth, or it will become inordinately fond of flesh. It must not be fed with cooked unground Kafir-corn, or it will never be able to cut its teeth—which one can easily believe! A child must not be given salt to eat or water to drink, or it will suffer much from thirst. Smith mentions<sup>506</sup> other food-taboos that are imposed upon children, and the penalty to which breach of each taboo renders the child obnoxious. The fact that many of these penalties affect the genitals will surprise no one who has recognized the extent to which the thoughts of the Bantu run on sexual subjects.

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO DEATH<sup>507</sup>

Death is simply crowded with taboos, as we should expect the greatest mystery of life to be. Perhaps the truest thing we can say about their idea of death is that they regard it as contagious; but if we say this, we must carefully divest our word 'contagious' of its pathogenic meaning. There are no micro-organisms in the world of Bantu thought: what we regard as contagion is to them a magical or spiritual effect.

The following are but a few of the many taboos that are associated with death. A corpse must not be buried by a person who is not full-grown, for the sight of it would kill a youth with fear. Children must not play nor work near a corpse, nor look upon it, nor tread upon a grave. Among Mashona it is taboo for the eldest son to touch the corpse of his father, or for the head wife to touch that of her husband, lest the spirit should carry them off. The grave is taboo: one must not stand or sit upon it, nor remove anything from it; and the beer that is placed there as an

<sup>506</sup> IPNR. ii. 17.

<sup>507</sup> See Num. xix. 11-22 for similar Hebrew notions.

offering to deceased is respected even by the drouthy and dishonest. If human bones are accidentally unearthed, they must never be touched.

Closely connected with the taboo of graves, is that of the house in which death has occurred, or, in some tribes, the house of deceased, whether he died in it or died elsewhere. When the Chinese, at an early period of their history, lived in unsubstantial huts, the hut in which a man died was given up to his body. Ancient Indo-Europeans, also, buried their dead beside the family hearth: a custom which lingered in the memory of the Greeks of the classical period, fashioned the Roman cult of the *lares*, and tarried among the Celts till a late date.<sup>508</sup> It is only as Bantu tribes have found it possible to abandon the nomadic life and settle down to more regular agricultural and pastoral pursuits that exposure of the dead gave way to burial;<sup>509</sup> but in some tribes the custom of burying a dead person in the house in which he lived, and the kindred custom of burying him in the courtyard of his house, is not yet extinct. In Livingstone's time the Bakwena often buried their dead in the huts in which they died, for fear lest the witches should disinter their friends and use some part of the body in their fiendish arts.<sup>510</sup> In some cases the Bakaonde still bury the body in the hut of deceased, though the practice is not so common as it once was.<sup>511</sup> Now when the grave was dug in the house, the family had either to share the home with the dead, or abandon it to the corpse and the spirit. Both customs were known to the Bantu, but the latter is much more common, and is observed by some tribes who long ago came to bury their dead outside. Among the tribes around Nyasa with which Macdonald was acquainted, if a man was buried in his own house, the house was not broken down, but was usually covered with a cloth, and offerings to deceased were presented on the verandah; but in other cases the house was demolished, and its site swept, covered with fresh earth, and regarded as sacred. What is even more significant is that if deceased was buried in some other part of the village, a new house

<sup>508</sup> SCD. 44-45, 129-131.

<sup>509</sup> Exposure of the dead still prevails in some tribes; see AK. 66. MTR. 511.

<sup>510</sup> MTR. 129.

<sup>511</sup> WBA. 84. 90.

was built over his grave.<sup>512</sup> Among the Mashona<sup>513</sup> a dead "man's hut is not deserted, his widow continuing to use it; but in the case of a wife having died, her hut is not used, but is allowed to fall into disrepair, and eventually is pulled down." Among tribes south of Mashonaland, if deceased was the wife, her side of the hut must be left for her spirit; but if deceased was the head of the family, the Kafirs and Becwana leave the hut to decay, and the Zulus burn it. The Baronga remove the crown of the hut immediately after the burial of its master; "this crown will be put before the door to close it, and no one will dare to enter any more till the day of the crushing of the hut."<sup>514</sup> This crushing of the hut takes place some months later, when the sacrifice for the canonization of the dead is offered. Burning the hut was the old law of the Kafirs, and of some other tribes; but it was fraught with danger to other homes. It is sometimes done by tribes on Lake Nyasa, though the commoner practice is to demolish the house and dig over the foundations.<sup>515</sup> The Baluba of the Congo basin burn the hut of deceased at sunrise on the morning after the funeral.<sup>516</sup> "If a stranger comes to a Kikuyu village and dies in a hut there, the hut is completely abandoned if the owner belongs to the Kikuyu guild; a large hole is made in the side of the hut . . . ; the corpse is left inside and the hyenas come and carry it off. The hut is then left to fall into ruins, and no articles such as cooking-pots, beer, jars, etc., are removed from it. The men who broke the hole in the wall are even considered unclean, as much as if they had handled a corpse."<sup>517</sup> "On the death of a woman" of the Akamba, "her hut is closed, for her spirit continues to dwell there; if, however, she has a grown daughter and children they may inhabit the hut. No huts are closed on the death of a husband, for the simple reason that a man has no hut. There is a belief among the Akamba that on the death of a woman her spirit comes at night to cohabit with her husband."<sup>518</sup> All the wives of an elder of the

<sup>512</sup> A. I. 108-110.

<sup>513</sup> MLC. 45.

<sup>514</sup> LSAT. i. 144.

<sup>515</sup> NBCA. 165.

<sup>516</sup> GGC. 645.

<sup>517</sup> BBM. 122.

<sup>518</sup> Hon. Charles Dundas: JRAI, 1913, p. 522. Cf. also, AK. 66-7.

Akamba, except the first, are thrown out after death; but curiously enough "their bodies must not be taken through the gate; a special opening is made in the village fence for the purpose, the opening being afterwards closed up again."<sup>519</sup> The custom of breaking a hole in the back wall of the hut for the emergence of the corpse to its burial, is widespread among Bantu tribes. The Becwana lay stress upon it. It was customary in Basutoland when Europeans first entered that territory.<sup>520</sup> The Atonga observe it,<sup>521</sup> and their usage of calling the chief undertaker *chimbwi* (hyena) is suggestive.<sup>522</sup> The Tumbuka, who live further to the west, have a similar custom.<sup>523</sup>

But it is not alone the house of deceased that is under taboo; the taboo rests upon all his personal possessions. Not one of these can be used till it is purified; and there are impurities that only fire can take away. The Zulus burn the clothes of deceased in winter, but in summer the smoke of such a burning would stop the rain, and in these rainy months the clothes are buried. The Kafirs bury all the personal belongings that are not iron; and both Zulu and Kafir tribes purge the iron things with fire. The Becwana have allowed this latter custom to lapse,<sup>524</sup> and are content to purify weapons by smearing them with chyme from the ox that is sacrificed a month after burial.<sup>525</sup> Among them the clothes of deceased fall to his maternal uncle, but he must not take them away in summer or autumn months lest hail-storms ensue. The milk in a dead man's calabashes and milk-sacks must be poured out,<sup>526</sup> and his relatives must not touch his cattle nor use milk from his cows (though other people may) till they have offered the final sacrifice for the liberation of his spirit.<sup>527</sup> Even

<sup>519</sup> BBM. 101.

<sup>520</sup> NET. 364.

<sup>521</sup> NBGA. 161.

<sup>522</sup> For a somewhat similar use of the term 'hyena' see SB. 27.

<sup>523</sup> WPP. 158, AI. 162. In Ashanti "the body is removed through an improvised doorway, which later is closed up, in order to cheat the ghost if it wished to return to the house", RAA. 190 & 160. (The last clause is not convincing.)

<sup>524</sup> A Becwana proverb runs: "The axe-handle is burnt; the axe remains; it is still said, 'Greetings! Son-of-so-and-so.'" It means that though a man dies, his son still keeps his name alive; but its metaphor is due to the fact that the axe was purged in fire that consumed the haft before it passed to the heir.

<sup>525</sup> "The Jews at Gibraltar, on a death occurring in any house, pour away all the water contained therein, on the supposition that the Angel of Death may have washed his sword in it." CFL. 171.

<sup>526</sup> See SB. 36.

the gardens of the dead are taboo: Becwana like them to lie fallow for a year, and Zulus leave a small portion unploughed. Do these taboos on cattle and gardens depend upon mortal dread of death or upon fear of offending the discarnate spirit by hastily swooping down upon his estate? All the banana trees of a free-man of the Balolo (on the lower Lulongo River) are cut down when he dies, and the fruit of his plantation left to rot on a platform.<sup>527</sup>

Mourners also are under taboo. They must fast with more or less stringency, and have little to do with their neighbors for a longer or shorter period: Kafir widows avoid people for a day or two after the death of their husbands, and Zulu mothers neither eat nor associate with people for two weeks after the death of their children. While the taboo is upon them, mourners must not pass through a herd of cattle, nor be unmindful of the fact that their presence is a danger to young children, however good their intentions may be. The heads of male and female relatives are shaved soon after the funeral, and again when the spirit of deceased is sent on to the gods. In the Tumbuka tribe, friends of the deceased remain under several taboos for nearly a year, being forbidden to shave their heads, or to live with their wives, or to marry.<sup>528</sup> Macdonald mentions<sup>529</sup> that tribes on Nyasa used to bury some of the hair from the first and second shaving of mourners on the site of the dead man's house. This second shaving appears to accompany the rites of canonization, which is performed a few days after burial by some tribes, and a month or more later by others. It always marks the release of mourners from taboo, though in many tribes (Lumbu, Thonga, Becwana, for example) surviving spouses remain under sexual taboo for a longer period.

Since the shaven head is not of itself a sufficient indication of contamination, some other token of mourning is insisted upon in most communities. Bereaved Basuto substitute little chains of iron for their usual necklaces of copper or glass beads, and widows and orphans wear a cord round the head.<sup>530</sup> In Bec-

<sup>527</sup> GGC. 652.

<sup>528</sup> WPP. 160.

<sup>529</sup> A. 110-12.

<sup>530</sup> Bs. 205.

wana towns the wearing of only one sandal or of a cloak turned inside out is much more significant. Swazi mourning costume consists of grass skirts and ornaments.<sup>531</sup> Ngoni widows wear caps of woven grass, and endless strings of twisted bark about their necks, carefully neglecting to wash or beautify their bodies or their homes.<sup>532</sup> The Baronga wear pieces of dark blue cotton cloth.<sup>533</sup> Each tribe has its own notion of what is befitting.<sup>534</sup> Did our Western habiliments of woe originate in the demand of our magically-minded ancestors for some quarantine-sign that should indicate the presence of this taboo?

Even a village in which death has occurred is under taboo: none of its inhabitants may venture to do any kind of field-work on the day when the herald announces that one of the villagers is dead.

Among the Akamba, "On every death there is the purification of the village to be observed. On the seventh day a brother of the deceased must cohabit with one of his widows. Within this period no man may have connection with any woman or he will be stricken with 'Makwa.' The village is then purified, but on the eleventh day the elders are given a sheep and honey beer, and until this is done a daughter of the village who is married at another village may not come to her paternal kraal. This purification takes place on the death of all male adults and on the death of the big wife; when other wives and small children have died, the period of purification required only lasts for three days."<sup>535</sup>

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO CONTACT WITH THE SUPERNATURAL

Anything which has come into contact with the supernatural<sup>536</sup> is taboo, as well as the body of one who has been touched by

<sup>531</sup> EK. 246.

<sup>532</sup> AA. 30.

<sup>533</sup> LSAT. i. 146.

<sup>534</sup> See ACC. 32of.

<sup>535</sup> JRAL., 1913, p. 522.

<sup>536</sup> The idea of the supernatural is beyond the reach of people who are unaware of a constant natural order of things; but magic insists, as science does, upon a regular sequence of cause and effect. The Bantu are so sure of the uniformity of nature that they cannot conceive of its variation without the interference of some will which means to interfere. If the rainy season is delayed, they are convinced that some will more powerful than theirs has delayed it on purpose; and their first care is to discover and correct the fault that has aroused the ire of



death. If a hut has been struck by lightning, no part of it may be touched till the magician has sprinkled it with a purifying mixture, such as an infusion of roots mixed with the blood and chyme of an ox; and even after that the materials may only be moved out of the village and thrown away. If the hut is already outside the village, it is usually deserted and left to decay. The inhabitants of such a hut are under taboo till they are freed from their uncleanness. According to Shooter, if a person is struck by lightning, all the inhabitants of his village fast and do not drink water till the village is purified.<sup>537</sup> If a garden is struck by lightning, none of its produce can be eaten till the garden has been ceremonially cleansed. An animal killed by lightning must not be eaten—this among people whose best wishes for a successful journey is expressed in the valediction, 'May you hap upon a dead eland by the way!' The Bahuma of Ankole and of Bunyoro hold that "when lightning strikes and kills any cows, the rest of the herd may not be removed from that place till the medicine-man has released them by making an offering to the god of thunder."<sup>538</sup> A tree or other object struck by lightning must not be touched till it is 'cleansed.'<sup>539</sup>

Perhaps the sacredness of a chief's person<sup>540</sup> should be included under this heading. Chiefs who owe their paramountcy to the fact that they are heirs of a long line of what have come to be dynastic gods, are intrinsically taboo. I have heard a powerful Becwana chief saluted by old men from remote villages as *Modimo oa me!* ('My god!').

this invisible person. When a magician fails to produce an expected result, he ascribes his defeat to some error in the performance of his own ritual, or, much more frequently, to the introduction of adverse and overpowering agents by some rival in occult science. Although the idea of natural and supernatural as we understand it, is undoubtedly foreign to their thought, the Bantu do distinguish, with more or less vagueness, between happenings that are traceable (by those who are sufficiently learned in such lore) to human and other mundane personalities, and certain strange and awful events which they attribute to the intervention of higher spirit-personalities. Whether these latter can be influenced by rites and formulas of the magician, like mundane personalities of every kind, is another question; most Bantu seem to believe that they can. Magical rites that are conspicuous in the ritual of ancestor-worship are capable of another explanation; but there are Bantu magicians who profess to ward off lightning, and some of them claim to be able to send it on their errands of vengeance.

<sup>537</sup> KNZC. 216.

<sup>538</sup> SCA. 153.

<sup>539</sup> Cf. LSAT. ii. 290 ff. & EK. 124.

<sup>540</sup> Cf. LSAT. i. 356, ii. 533.

Certain tracts of land are so sacred that they must never be cultivated and the trees that grow on them must never be felled; but this taboo is probably connected with the burial-places of chiefs,<sup>541</sup> like that of certain sacred groves,<sup>542</sup> and should, therefore, be included under Taboos of Death rather than Taboos of Contact with the Supernatural.

TABOOS PERTAINING TO HAIL AND RAIN

There is much to suggest that hail and rain are almost as supernatural as lightning. "When rain first falls" the Baila "do not work for two or three days: nobody makes any attempt to hoe. This is an act of reverence towards Leza. They say: 'Do not wound (him) with a hoe, do not wound his water, his urine'." "The idea is that any field-work done that day is an offence against him, which would prejudice the success of the sowing."<sup>543</sup> "There appears to be no word in Chikaonde for 'taboo', but it is implied in the verb *Kuchina* to fear"; and taboos are not so common among the Bakaonde as among neighboring tribes. But "when the first rains fall, all work in the garden ceases. On no account must any work be done, no matter how urgent it may appear to be. The reason given being that if any garden work is done it will 'cut off' the rain, and the crops will be spoilt."<sup>544</sup> The taboo of field-work on the day after the first heavy rain of the season is well-nigh universal among the Bantu; and tribes that never heard of Leza similarly relate the taboo to a supernatural controller of the weather. There are also a number of cognate taboos, which are almost as common. For instance, in Becwana tribes water of the first heavy rain that makes the land ploughable must not be drunk by a widow or a widower, or by a child whose parents have died since last rainy-season, or by those who have lost their children since then. The Becwana say that the felling or lopping of most kinds of trees during the rainy-season would be resented by the power that presides over the weather; and the people of Loango thought,<sup>545</sup> though by this

<sup>541</sup> See p. 4.

<sup>542</sup> LSAT. ii. 351ff., IPNR. ii. 183ff.

<sup>543</sup> IPNR. ii. 209 & i. 139. and cf. SB. 363n.

<sup>544</sup> WBA. 83, 94, 139.

<sup>545</sup> SAAB. 51.

time they have probably found reason to modify their opinion, that the burial of a White-man in their country would stop the rain.

Many tribes regard the day after a hailstorm, or a tempest with lightning, as a taboo-day, or 'sabbath.' It has been already mentioned that the removal of a dead man's clothes during the rainy-season would cause hailstorms; but it should be noted, also, that the violation of many taboos is punished with hailstorms, which seem to be peculiarly indicative of the ire of ancestral spirits.

Even the clouds are susceptible to insult. You must not point at rain-clouds with the index-finger, or you will drive them away. If you must point at them, you should point with the thumb over your shoulder, or with the open hand—the thumb preferred; but it is better not to take such risks.

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO THE NUMBER 'SEVEN'

The Becwana, like some other Bantu tribes, regard 'seven' as a sacred or taboo number. No Becwana chief would send a party of *seven* on any embassy, or it would certainly fail in its mission; and though fathers are generally keen on a high bride-price for their daughters, the most avaricious of them all would rather take six cattle than *seven*. It is a far cry from Bechuanaland to Kenya Colony; but in Kikuyu "a herdsman will not herd his flocks for more than six days, and on the seventh must be relieved by another man. If a man has been on a journey and absent for six days he must not return home on the seventh day; rather than return to his village on that day he will go and sleep at the house of a neighbor a short distance away. If this law is broken, serious illness is certain to supervene."<sup>546</sup> The Theraka or Thaaka who live on both sides of the Tana River and are related to the Akamba, regard the number 'seven' as very unlucky.<sup>547</sup> The Baganda consider 'nine' to be a sacred number for all gifts and offerings to the gods.<sup>548</sup> A writer in the 'Manchester Guardian'<sup>549</sup> states: "To say 'seven' or 'nine' is

<sup>546</sup> BBM. 125.

<sup>547</sup> JRAI., 1913., p. 547.

<sup>548</sup> Bg. 292.

<sup>549</sup> Nov. 30, 1923.

considered by many tribes of West African blacks to be extremely rash. The Dioula, the Malinkay, and the Bambara, for example, are so scared at these numbers that the names of them have disappeared from their languages. For seven they have an expression that, as near as we can translate it, amounts to 'six A' or 'six and um-hum.' For nine they say 'stomach time,' alluding to the period of human gestation." The Becwana have no words for 'eight' or 'nine', and express these ideas by means of such phrases as 'ten with two fingers (or one) folded down' or 'broken off' or 'left'; but the absence of these numbers in their system of notation has nothing to do with taboo.

The sacredness or ill-luck (it is hard to distinguish between the two in their primitive sense) of the number 'seven' throughout the world has been attributed to ancient knowledge of seven heavenly bodies, seven senses, seven metals, the seven-day phase of the moon, etc. The Akamba told the Hon. Charles Dundas<sup>550</sup> that they regard seven as a bad number, because the evil results of bewitching a person are said always to appear on the seventh day; which seems to be an attempt to explain the obscure by means of the more obscure. It is more likely that the evil results of bewitchment are expected to appear on the seventh day because seven is a bad number. The Becwana explanation is quite different. All Bantu tribes count on their fingers, either with or without accompanying remark. The Becwana method is as follows:<sup>551</sup> The little finger of the left-hand stands for 'one', when it is held erect and the other fingers are folded down under the thumb; 'two' is indicated by showing that finger and the one next it, both erect, the others being held down by the thumb; 'three' and 'four' are expressed in an analogous manner. The thumb of the left-hand stands for five. It may be shown standing alone, but is usually seen standing out at an angle with the other four fingers, all erect. There is no ambiguity in this method of counting, and one falls easily into the practice. Its resemblance to Roman numerals is noteworthy—especially if the older symbol, IIII, which is still found on clock-faces, be used instead of IV. The V is the natural symbol of the gesture for 'five'. Then you

<sup>550</sup> JRAL, 1913., p. 531.

<sup>551</sup> See my *Race Problems in the New Africa*, p. 35; and compare the Baganda method described in Bg. 40-41.

pass to the right hand, of which the thumb stands for VI., and is always shown as a single digit with the other fingers folded. The V that precedes the digit in the written Roman symbol is dispensed with in the gesture-language; because the observer sees that you are using the right hand, and knows that the left hand precedes it. The fore-finger of the right hand stands for VII.<sup>552</sup> What we want to emphasize here, however, is that what we call the index-finger is known to the Becwana as the 'pointing-finger'; and that the Becwana word for 'seven' is *shupa*, which, when used as a verb, means 'to point out'. Now, pointing out a person is not merely an insult: it is a curse.<sup>557</sup>

"When he points at you with his finger", said Mboza of his Chief, "you are a dead man."<sup>553</sup> When Chaka pointed at a man with his finger, it was a sentence of death that the bystanders promptly executed;<sup>554</sup> but Mboza was referring to that mysterious spirit-power with which Chiefs are supposed to be pre-eminently charged. Among the Akamba, so Hobley tells us,<sup>555</sup> "a medicine man points at a person or an object with the fingers extended but with the first and second joint doubled, if he pointed at a person with his finger he would be liable to an accusation of designs on the life of the person pointed at." "The simplest act of bewitchery", says Smith,<sup>556</sup> "is to point with the index-finger in the direction of a person while thinking or mumbling a desire for his death. Christian preachers have sometimes got themselves into fearful trouble by innocently emphasizing some point in their sermon by shaking an index-finger in the face of the congregation. They have been charged with bewitching their hearers." The second and third sentences in this quotation show that the act is dreaded, quite apart from the thinking or mumbling. The primitive idea that talking about a thing makes it happen, which survives in our own adage, 'Talk of the devil and you'll see his

<sup>552</sup> The stems of words for the numerals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, are the same in Luganda as in Secwana, but the gesture-language is different. See Bg. 40-41.

<sup>557</sup> Traces of this belief are found in the folklore of England, Germany, Hungary, Austria, China, America and Australia. The 'pointing bone' is a familiar method of aggressive magic among Australian aborigines (See JRAL. 1925. pp. 90-114.)

<sup>553</sup> LSAT. i. 357.

<sup>554</sup> KNZC. 271.

<sup>555</sup> AK. 10.

<sup>556</sup> RLR. 14.

horns',<sup>558</sup> is apparent in a thousand phases of Bantu speech and custom;<sup>559</sup> and so is the kindred idea that 'deeds speak louder than words', or that gesture is more eloquent than speech. To understand a large part of Bantu magic, one must be ever mindful of this regulative principle of Bantu thought, and of what Miss Harrison has so beautifully said, in *Ancient Art and Ritual*, concerning the relation between *drama* and *dromenon*. When you point out a person, you bring him to the attention of all who are near you, the majority of whom are unseen beings; and the Bantu hold that it is a very dangerous thing to focus the attention of the spirits upon any individual whatever. The Bcwana say, further, that if you associate any individual with the number 'seven' it is tantamount to pointing at him with the index-finger.

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO THE ABNORMAL AND THE UNCANNY

Almost everything abnormal and uncanny is associated with taboo; probably because the Bantu do not distinguish between abnormal, unnatural, and supernatural.

In Kikuyu, so Hopley asserts,<sup>560</sup> "if a tree falls on a hut it is considered extremely unlucky, the hut will not be abandoned, but it is necessary for the head of the village to kill a ram; it is led round the village before being killed. If this was not done, the owner of the village, or at any rate the woman who lived in the hut, would become the victim of a *thahu* or curse. The owner of the village, however, may not enter the hut until the sacrifice has been made to appease the *ngoma* or ancestral spirits who inflict the *thahu*." Such an occurrence would be but indirectly connected with taboo: *thahu* was probably used in a secondary sense to denote the displeasure of the spirits. Accidents don't happen, according to Bantu thinking; unusual events are brought about by spirits who are roused to action by the indifference or

<sup>558</sup> Irish peasants think it risky to mention 'pixies' or 'fairies', and therefore veil their allusions to these aboriginal ghosts in vague phrases, such as 'the little people', or 'thim up yonder', that is, up on the knolls and hill-tops where the ancient barrows are.

<sup>559</sup> In Angola, so Monteiro writes, "the blacks always use the word 'Ngana', or 'Sir', when speaking of the lion, as they believe that he is a 'fetish', and would not fail to punish them for their want of respect if they omitted to do so." (ARC. ii. 116.)

<sup>560</sup> JRAI. 1911, p. 408.

misbehaviour of their worshippers or by the bewitchment of mischief-makers; and it is always risky to associate with marked men. Fortunately a rich repast, with appropriate civilities, may be trusted to smooth down the ruffled feelings of either the quick or the dead.

As already remarked,<sup>561</sup> a woman who has aborted is taboo, and so is the ground that was contaminated by the abortion. For such a woman the Baila build a hut away to the west of their village, and require her to remain there during the time of her uncleanness, cooking her own food in potsherds; and even when she has been purified and returns to her village, everyone in the village must drink 'medicine' so that her uncleanness may not attach itself to them.<sup>562</sup> "In the case of miscarriage, or of a child being born dead," the Kaonde "woman is said to be *kafunga*, and cannot touch any fire but her own, nor any dishes or other household articles. A shelter is made for her on the outskirts of the village, wherein she has to sleep, her food being supplied to her in old and broken pots. When the breasts are dry the shelter is set on fire, with the woman inside it, and she rushes out. Then the people take a large piece of bark from a big tree and place certain herbs inside it, and take it and the woman to the river. Arrived there she is put, quite naked, into the bark bath, and has to wash herself all over with the water and herbs, her husband being a spectator of the ablution. After this purification she is handed new clothes to wear, and returns to the village." But even after that, every inhabitant of the village has to be protected from any chance of evil that might ensue from the unfortunate event.<sup>563</sup>

Some of the scattered fragments of tribes that were dwelling in the Northern Bechuanaland Protectorate before the Bamangwato arrived there, insist that unless an abortion is buried in a cave or in some dark spot where the rain-clouds cannot see it, these messengers of mercy will avoid the district that has been thus defiled.

Conception before menstruation is a terrible taboo; the child must be killed, and in some tribes the mother also.

<sup>561</sup> See SB. 211.

<sup>562</sup> JPNR. ii. 6.

<sup>563</sup> WBA. 80.

Almost any abnormality in childbirth places the mother (and often the father) under a taboo which demands special and painful purificatory rites; and some tribes do not permit a child to live if it enters the world in an abnormal manner. The Baganda used to strangle children who were born feet first, and bury them at the cross-roads, instead of in the family burial-ground, believing that if permitted to live they would become thieves or murderers.<sup>564</sup> The Akikuyu were wont to suffocate such children, and throw them into the bush.<sup>565</sup> "If a child is born feet first it is considered most unlucky" by the Akamba, "and a boy so born cannot get a wife or a girl so born a husband. . . . The idea exists that no child of a person who was born feet first will be born alive."<sup>566</sup>

On the 21st of May, 1848, a Wanika woman gave birth to twins, "one of whom had six fingers"<sup>570</sup> but neither nose nor lips. In conformity with the custom of the Wanika the parents took the mis-shapen child to the chiefs, declaring the while, that as it was a Rogo, or a mis-birth, and would therefore be a criminal, they refused to mature it, and brought it to the chiefs that it might be strangled and buried in the wood. In conformity with this declaration the chiefs pressed its neck until it was suffocated; then burying it, and making the Muansa play, they offered up a Sadaka (sacrifice) that no harm might come upon the land because a Rogo was born."<sup>567</sup> It would appear from Krapf's narrative that this infant was strangled solely because it was deformed, not because it was a twin. "Any malformation with which a child may be born is considered a 'fetish' by the negroes in Angola. A very short or sunken neck is thought a very great fetish indeed. . . . Blacks with six fingers and toes are often seen, and are also considered as 'fetish'."<sup>568</sup> "They make away in one manner or another with the infirm, the deaf, the dumb, and the idiotic," writes Arbousset of the tribes in and around Basutoland,<sup>569</sup> "albinos are thrown to the panther; of

<sup>564</sup> Bg. 54.

<sup>565</sup> BBM. 154.

<sup>566</sup> AK. 61.

<sup>567</sup> TRML. 193.

<sup>568</sup> ARC. i. 272.

<sup>569</sup> NET. 372.

<sup>570</sup> See pp. 70f.



twins one is often taken to the woods and left as prey for the leopard; the suckling who has had the misfortune to lose his mother, is, with certain tribes, buried alive by her side; and with a handful of ashes, or a ladleful of boiling fat, they stifle those who are born blind." He mentions an instance in which a child two-and-a-half years old had been abandoned to the hyenas, because it was rickety. In Kafir tribes, "if the baby shows any signs of weakness or malformation it is exposed on the hills and allowed to die."<sup>571</sup> Among Negro tribes of the Niger Delta, also, babes born in an unusual way and children who cut their teeth in unexpected sequence, are thrown into the bush.<sup>572</sup>

To cut the upper central incisors before the lower, was regarded as an evil omen in Uganda; a child so unconformable to custom in the first months of its life was thought likely to ill-treat its mother if it were allowed to grow up.<sup>573</sup> The Akamba regard it as a bad sign if a child cuts its upper teeth first, but the child is not killed.<sup>574</sup> The Akikuyu do not regard a child who cuts its upper teeth first as taboo; but they do regard it as 'un-lucky'; and "to avert the ill-luck, a friend is asked to cohabit with the mother for a month, after which the husband returns to his wife." The child is sent to its maternal grandmother.<sup>575</sup> A boy who cut his upper incisors first was formerly killed by the Wachaga, but a girl was often sent with her mother to her maternal kindred.<sup>576</sup> Children who cut their upper teeth first are regarded with apprehension by the Bakonjo, who live on the upper plateaux of the eastern slopes of Mt. Ruwenzori, and offerings must be made to remove the displeasure of the gods.<sup>577</sup> Some of the Tumbuka deny that children whose upper teeth appear before the lower, were abandoned, but others confess that this was the custom; and Fraser adds that he has himself seen the body of a little child lying dead on the sand of a river, where it had been laid by its mother because of this abnormal teeth-cutting.<sup>578</sup> In some districts of Northern Rhodesia, babies who

<sup>571</sup> EK. 202.

<sup>572</sup> TWA. 324-28.

<sup>573</sup> Bg. 59.

<sup>574</sup> AK. 105.

<sup>575</sup> BBM. 154.

<sup>576</sup> K. 201.

<sup>577</sup> GS. 142.

<sup>578</sup> WPP. 149.

cut their upper teeth first were buried alive, or else thrown into the bush.<sup>579</sup> Babes who cut their upper teeth first (*lutala*), those who do not walk at the proper time (*chisheta*), and those born of girl-mothers who have not yet had their first menstruation, are destroyed by the Bakaonde of Northern Rhodesia, but not those who come into the world feet first. Melland, a shrewd observer and sane commentator on Native custom, helps us to spell out the meaning of these seemingly unnatural doings.<sup>580</sup> It is believed that someone dies every time a *lutala* child loses a milk tooth or a nail, and that a *chisheta* child is waiting till its relatives are dead before it begins to walk; hence the mother who should save such a child to the jeopardy of her neighbours would be guilty of constructive murder. We shall see presently that there has been a softening of manners in some tribes with regard to their treatment of twins, and it stimulates one's faith in humanity to learn that the Bakaonde have been casting about for some mode of conserving the welfare of the village without doing violence to a mother's love for her offspring. It seems that, in order to save her friends from their impending fate, it was common for the mother of a *lutala* child to strap her babe as usual in a cloth upon her back, take it to a river, loosen the cloth, let the child fall into the water, and then go on her way without looking back. The admonition not to look back is often attached to a magician's prescription; but here it is enough to remember that the little pet has lived long enough to wind itself round the mother's heart with its smiling and its cooing, and that even a hasty glimpse of its death struggles would be an intolerable addition to her torture. Now, the interesting fact is that the Bakaonde have sought a way of averting this tragedy. "The mother may be allowed to put all the teeth as they come out, all loose nails, all nail-parings, all hair as cut, into one calabash and keep it. After the last milk tooth has come out the calabash is taken and carried on the mother's back, like a baby, in the same cloth that she has been wearing to carry the child. She goes to the river and drops the calabash off her back, as she would have done the baby. . . . As the calabash splashes into the

<sup>579</sup> WR. 122., and cf. GPNR. 180.

<sup>580</sup> WBA. 50ff.

water she calls out 'Here is the *lutala*.'"<sup>581</sup> This method of saving a *lutala* child is still rarely practised, apparently; it is probably too new to be wholly trustworthy, needing a score or two of instances in which it has not been followed by untoward events in the village before it can become stable; but it shows how easily spirits may be hoodwinked, and how human affection sometimes steals a march on irrational terror. In the Mweru-Bangweulu district, "if a child cuts its lower incisors first it is a 'lucky child', and received life's justification mark—the white chalk. If other teeth sprout first the child is 'unlucky', and condemned to be thrown into the river."<sup>582</sup> When Livingstone was staying at Kabwabwata, three days N. E. of Lake Mweru, he made the following entry in his Journal, under date Feby. 25, 1868:—"If a child cuts the upper front teeth before the lower, it is killed, as unlucky."<sup>583</sup> this is a widely spread superstition. When I was among the Makololo, in 1859, one of Sekeletu's wives would not allow her servant's child to be killed for this; but few would have the courage to act in opposition to public feeling as she did.<sup>584</sup> In Casembe's country, if a child is seen to turn from one side to the other in sleep it is killed." The Bechwana of the south-eastern plateau, would not suffer a child to live if it cut the upper central incisors before the lower.<sup>585</sup> The *Thonga* had a similar practice.<sup>586</sup> This taboo was very widespread, and even the destruction of children who were late in learning to walk was by no means confined to a few tribes.

Under this heading must be included, also, the taboo of twins—a taboo which is likely to baffle an investigator who finds the custom of one tribe apparently antithetic to that of another and lacks the key to the enigma. To say that the mystic scroll of time-worn African custom cannot be accurately deciphered except in the light of the history of mankind, is to utter a truism; but it is better to be trite than to overlook elementary principles when face to face with an alien and obscure usage, like that of

<sup>581</sup> Cf. pp. 232ff.

<sup>582</sup> *IHB.* 169.

<sup>583</sup> He repeats this remark under date May 24, 1872. See LLJ. *in loco*.

<sup>584</sup> Cf. MTR. 577.

<sup>585</sup> LSAT. i. 49f.

<sup>586</sup> Stirke, writing off Barotseland in 1922, says: "A child born deformed is killed, generally by the mother choking it by forcing the breast well into its mouth." (BRT. 62.)

the taboo of twins. Appalling as this taboo is in our eyes, it has played a conspicuous part in the history of well-nigh every branch of the human race, peopling the pantheon of the pagan world and the calendar of the Christian Church; as Dr. Rendel Harris convincingly shows in three books, which are issued by the Cambridge University Press: *The Dioscuri in the Christian Legends, the Cult of the Heavenly Twins, and Boanerges*.

Physiologists tell us that the cause of twins in normally uniparous animals is either an unusual segmentation of a single ovum, which results in two individuals identical in sex and most other characteristics, or else the concurrent development of two separate ova, in which case there may be much dissimilarity, especially if there are two sires. Unlike some backward races of whom one reads in books, the Bantu are well aware that 'you cannot have calves without a bull', to use a metaphor that is common in their pastoral tribes; but their knowledge of physiology is meagre and defective, and the magical element is prominent in their interpretation of the phenomena of birth. The doctrine of reincarnation in descendants<sup>587</sup> which is held by some tribes, appears to be based upon the assumption that an unborn babe may be vitalized by the discarnate spirit of one of its father's ancestors; and such children are welcomed into the family circle. But unfortunately there are other spirits abroad than those of the hearth and home; there are kinless spirits, hungry and cold for want of worshippers, wandering spirits that have never been sent forward to the dwellings of the gods, aboriginal spirits of the woodland and the wild, spirits of animals and spirits of things. And the Bantu seem to think that if a woman ventures near the lurking-place of one of these spirits during the months of her reproductive susceptibility, it may enter the fecund womb. To such an intervention they ascribe the birth of twins, one of which is consequently believed to be of spirit-parentage—it is hard to say which. Now taboo is contagious, as is abundantly evident from the foregoing pages; and the babe that has been in close contact with its supernatural companion during the months of gestation, as well as the mother that bore them, are centres of contamination which the neighbours greatly dread. Originally,

<sup>587</sup> See SB. 169ff.

as far as we can make out, the community was wont to rid itself of these perilous people, and then to cleanse itself from the contagion to which it had been exposed,—a practice which still survives in many Bantu tribes. Subsequently, however, milder measures prevailed in some tribes; the mother and her babes were driven forth from the community, instead of being killed; or the twins were killed and the mother purified by an appropriate ritual. Both modifications of custom are still found in various parts of Africa. Some tribes have advanced another step along the pathway of mercy, having dared to receive mother and twins back into the community after a more or less prolonged exile in some secluded spot, always insisting, of course, upon appropriate rites of expurgation; and some tribes have come to see that rites of expurgation are enough in themselves, without the period of ostracism.

For some reason hard to divine, but in which sympathetic magic undoubtedly plays a part, the Bantu associate twins with fertility in crops, domestic animals and people; and, also, with rain. In Bechuanaland, where the fitfulness and paucity of showers mean hunger for the people, 'Go with rain!' or 'Stay with rain!' or 'Sleep with rain!' is a pious valediction, which, like our own 'Good-bye!' has lost its pristine lustre through ages of common use. Rain is a Bantu synonym for fertility and every other godsend, though it has probably lost its significance in favoured districts, like that of Upoto on the northern bend of the Congo, where the rainfall is abundant and sometimes excessive. Fertility is therefore probably the link between twins and rain. Another explanation has, however, been suggested. Junod says that twins are called *bana ba Tilo*, which he translates 'children of Heaven', a translation reminiscent of the epithet Dioscuri (Zeus' boys) which the Greeks conferred upon their idealised twin-brethren, Castor and Pollux; and Rendel Harris quotes a song of the Warundi,<sup>587</sup> who dwell in the volcanic district between the Uganda frontier and Tanganyika, which credits the storm-god with the parentage of twins. But it is questionable whether *bana ba Tilo* may not be a Thonga equivalent for the phrase *bana ba milimo* 'children of spirits', which the

<sup>587</sup> Bo. 113, 127.

Ngombe tribe at Upoto applies to twins,<sup>588</sup> and which expresses an idea that appears to be co-extensive with the Bantu race; and one wonders whether the Warundi storm-god is related to the Bantu lightning-bird,<sup>589</sup> or is a deposit left by Sudanic or Galla streams of influence which have both flowed over the life of that tribe.

Whether or not we are able to account for the belief, it is an indisputable fact that twins have some sort of a relation to rain, according to Bantu thinking. The Bechuana required the bodies of suffocated twins to be placed in new earthenware waterpots, and sent to the chief, whose master-of-the-rain-rites dried them, ground them to powder, and, when the time came, used them as ingredients in the 'rain-pot' mixture and in charms for the fertilization of the arable lands; and tribes which permitted twins to live, credited them, or their parents, or both, with an occult control of rain-clouds which could draw showers to famished fields or stop a downpour that was swamping the crops.

The common Bantu custom of using two waterpots as reliquaries for slain twins, or for the placentae of those who were not done to death, is very curious. It puts one in remembrance of the two amphorae which are figured among symbols of heavenly twins in ancient sculptures; I suppose psycho-analysts would say that the pot functions in the ritual as a symbol for the womb,<sup>590</sup> and that according to 'the process whereby one idea is used (mostly unwittingly) as a substitute for an unconscious idea' the unwelcome visitors are sent back whence they came. No African that I ever met has been able to furnish an ostensible motive for this use of waterpots.<sup>591</sup> In many versions of an African folk-tale that I know best under the title of Masilo and Masilonyane (Silly and Silly secundus),—names, by the way, which might well suggest twins were they not affirmed to belong to early (eponymous?) chiefs of a tribe (Bakwena) which did not suffer twins to live—Masilonyane comes upon an inverted waterpot in the wilderness, and upon turning it over he

<sup>588</sup> Bo. 85.

<sup>589</sup> See pp. 91ff.

<sup>590</sup> See JRAL, 1924., pp. 57-59.

<sup>591</sup> "In the XXIIInd dynasty" (of Egypt), "in a cemetery of infants, the bodies were all packed in old jars." (RLAE. 151.)

liberates an unearthly woman, who takes him to her home under a deep pool in a river, and rewards him with black and white cattle of entrancing beauty. These cattle excite the envy of his brother Masilo, who treacherously slays him that he may possess the herd; and forthwith Masilonyane becomes a little bird which perches on the horns of the oxen and twitters out its condemnation of the fratricide. And the bird is not of this world; for the fact that it is repeatedly killed and finally ground to powder by the alarmed Masilo does not seem to make the slightest difference to the incriminating warbler. Whether this tale would throw any light on the nature of twins if we could get back to the motif of its composer, I cannot undertake to say; possibly the suggestive names of the two brothers, the extramundane prisoner in the waterpot, the enrichment of the herd of him who befriended her, the quarrel between the two brothers, and the deathless dicky-bird that carolled forth its cry for vengeance, may be nothing more than the dramatic furniture of some old-world story-teller who never sought an adorning moral for his tale.

Harris has an instructive passage concerning the capriciousness of West Coast notions about twins. "The distribution of the taboo is extremely erratic," he says.<sup>592</sup> "Twins are unwelcome in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, yet the reverse is the case among the Egbas of Nigeria. In the Congo territories, twins cause the greatest joy to a tribe and the mother is lauded wherever she goes, whilst among the tribes of the Oil Rivers of Nigeria, the birth of twins is regarded as the most fearful calamity which can fall upon the community. In the Upper Congo regions, the traveller may frequently see two earthenware pots hoisted on forked stakes which have been driven in the ground, one on either side the path, and these are in honour of twins born in the nearest compound. Every person passing by these pots will religiously pluck two leaves and throw one at the foot of each forked pole as a votive offering to 'Bokecu' and 'Mboyo', as all good twins are named. The tragedy of the oil rivers is one of the most distressing in West Africa. Throughout the Eastern, and to a considerable extent of the Central Prov-

<sup>592</sup> DDA. 69-70.

ince, the cruel custom prevails of putting to death one, sometimes both twins. . . . Not only are the children killed, but the mother is immediately driven from home. In some districts the custom is less rigorous, and the mothers of twins are allowed to form isolated villages and to engage in trade. Some tribes again whilst driving them from the home of their husbands, permit them to engage in agricultural pursuits upon their husband's lands."

The Egbas of Nigeria, to whom Harris refers in the above quotation, are a junior branch of the Yoruba nation. Johnson, speaking of the Yoruba (the nation to which he belongs), says:<sup>593</sup> "The custom of killing twins prevailed all over the country in early times; it has died out all over the greater part of it so long ago, that no one can say precisely when or by whom a stop was put to it. But it happened once upon a time when the practice still prevailed that one of the wives of the Alafin (King Ajaka) gave birth to twins, and the king was loth to destroy them, he thereupon gave orders that they should be removed—with the mother—to a remote part of the kingdom and there to remain and be regarded as dead . . . . Probably it was from this time that infanticide received its death blow—in Yoruba proper at least. It is said to linger still at Akuro and the adjacent regions." He states, also,<sup>594</sup> that "no condition is invested with an air of greater importance, or has a halo of deeper mystery about it, than that of twin-births; the influence is felt even upon children that may be born after them. Twins in Yoruba are almost credited with extra-human powers, although among some barbarous tribes they are regarded as monsters to be despatched at once . . . . The idea is that the first born was sent forward to announce the coming of the latter, and he is considered the younger of the two."

"In all parts of Benin, except at Arebon," according to Barbot,<sup>595</sup> "they honour women who have two children at a birth, and look upon it as a good presage . . . . But at Arebon, by a municipal law, they treat the twin-bearing woman barbarously, and kill both the mother and infants immediately, as a

<sup>593</sup> *History of the Yorubas*, p. 25.

<sup>594</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 80.

<sup>595</sup> C. v. 364-65.



sacrifice to a certain demon, which they firmly believe to be hovering continually in a wood near Arebon; unless the husband is so fond of her as to buy her off, by sacrificing a woman slave in her place, and it is but very seldom that any man fails of doing so. But as for the innocent twins, they are to die without redemption; and must be offered up in sacrifice, by an irrevocable and savage law; which barbarous custom is very grievous to the tender mothers of such miserable victims . . . However, this savage custom has in process of time made such impression on married men, that when the time of their wives delivery draws near, they send them to another country, fearing a twin-birth; and perhaps by degrees they may abolish such an inhuman law, founded on this extravagant notion, that it is impossible for a man to get a woman with child of two children at a time, and therefore look upon it as a prodigy or monstrous; and that they ought to be made away presently to atone their gods, who otherwise would certainly plague the whole land with some terrible calamities. The wood near Arebon, where the Blacks fondly believe the demon lies lurking, is so venerable and sacred to the inhabitants of that district, that they never permit any foreign men or women to enter it."

"Twins in Ashanti, if both of the same sex, belong, as of right, to the chief, and become, if girls, his potential wives, if boys, elephant-tail switchers at the court. They must be shown to him as soon as possible after birth, being carried to the 'palace' in a brass basin. Twins on state occasions, are dressed in white, each alike."<sup>596</sup> But twins born in the royal family are killed.<sup>597</sup>

Twins are not frequent among the Boloki of the Upper Congo, but they are welcomed as all children are. After their birth, the placentae are put into two old clay cooking-pots, and placed on forked poles on either side of the entrance to the village, as Harris has already mentioned; and Weeks says that these are intended to signify that twins have been born in the village, and to destroy any evil influences that might enter the town and harm the twins. Twins demand more than ordinary care from their parents: the first born must be carried on the right arm, and the second on the left, and the mother must dupli-

<sup>596</sup> AS. 99.

<sup>597</sup> RAA. 66.

cate her salutations, giving a greeting for each child. Presents are given in duplicate, or the child not receiving a present will fret and die; and the mother must eat, not with one hand, but with both, that each child may be properly nourished. The first born is always called *Nkumu*, and the second, *Mpeya*, and, unlike others, they must never change their names. If one of the twins dies, the mother borrows a baby of the same age, and puts it with the living twin that it may not fret.<sup>598</sup> A little farther up the Congo, at Upoto, twins are called *bana ba milimo* ('children of spirits'). Although there is no demand for rain-makers in a district blessed with a copious rainfall, one of the twins is sometimes called in to make excessive rain cease; and the curses and blessings of twins are significant of fortune to hunters and fishers.<sup>599</sup> On the lower Congo, one twin is often neglected and starved to death, and buried at the cross-roads, like a suicide or a man struck by lightning.<sup>600</sup>

The Bailundu (about 190 miles east of Benguela) do not destroy twins, but the woman who bears them is sent away to her own people till the children are able to walk well, when she returns to her husband; and twins and their parents are credited with power to stop unwelcome rain.<sup>601</sup>

There can hardly be a more striking contrast in the treatment of twins and their parents than that which is found in South-west Africa. The Ovambo, who dwell on the Kunene River, destroy twins immediately after birth; but their nearest southern neighbors, the Herero, requite the parents of twins with honour and riches in return for blessings of fertility which they are believed to bestow. Nevertheless, in the Herero custom the kinship of the unclean and the holy stands forth prominently; for the tribe first guards itself against the dangers that lurk in this aberration of birth by banishing parents and twins, even greeting them with hostile howls and missiles when they are recalled from their year of isolation for rehabilitation, and then, after sacrifice to the ancestral spirits, it endows the parents and twins with spiritual attributes and a well-feathered nest.<sup>602</sup>

<sup>598</sup> ACC. 130-31 and plate at p. 308.

<sup>599</sup> Bo. 85.

<sup>600</sup> APB. 116.

<sup>601</sup> *The Story of Chisamba*. By Herbert W. Baker. pp. 34, 31.

<sup>602</sup> Bo. 98.

A somewhat similar softening of manners seems to have occurred among the Ishogo of Loango, whom Du Chaillu visited in 1865. He says:<sup>603</sup> These people "have a strange notion or superstition that when twins are born, one of them must die early; so, in order, apparently, to avoid such a calamity, the mother is confined to her hut, or rather restricted in her intercourse with her neighbors, until both the children have grown up, when the danger is supposed to have passed. She is allowed during this time to go to the forest, but is not permitted to speak to any one not belonging to her family. During the long confinement no one but the father and mother are allowed to enter the hut, and the woman must remain chaste. If a stranger goes in by any accident or mistake, he is seized and sold into slavery. The twins themselves are excluded from the society of other children, and the cooking utensils, water vessels, &c., of the family are tabooed to everybody else." On the night after Du Chaillu arrived at Yengue, a woman who had had twins six years before was restored to normal intercourse; but he had no eyes for rites of restoration and knew little about taboo; so he described only what mattered to him—the dancing and drinking that kept him awake at night.

The Fans (sometimes spelled Fañg, Pañwe, Pahouin, or even Pawan) whose country lies on either side of the Ogowe River, still kill one of each pair of twins, so Cureau says.<sup>604</sup>

On the eastern side of the continent, the discordance of practice with regard to twins is as unmistakable as it is on the western. Among Kaffirs, "in olden days one of the twins was always put to death, and frequently both were killed . . . A woman who has twins is taunted with belonging to a disgraceful family, and in olden days if she gave birth to twins a second time she was killed as a monstrosity. When one of the twins was allowed to live, an old woman, generally the grandmother, would kill the second child by holding her hand over its mouth. In other cases the father placed a lump of earth in the mouth of the child. In other tribes the child was exposed in the veld, and was left for wild animals to devour, or else it was thrown into a river."<sup>605</sup> And

<sup>603</sup> *A Journey to Ashango-Land*, by Paul B. Du Chaillu, pp. 273f.

<sup>604</sup> *Savage Man in Central Africa*, p. 158.

<sup>605</sup> SC. 45.

in another book the same writer states<sup>606</sup> that "if a mother gives birth to twins, one is frequently killed by the father, for the natives think that unless the father places a lump of earth in the mouth of one of the babies he will lose his strength." So, too, with their cousins, the Zulus, at the end of last century: "If twins are born, one is immediately destroyed lest the father die."<sup>607</sup>

"When a woman has twins," said Campbell, writing of the Becwana in 1820, "one of the children is put to death. Should a cow have two calves, one of them is either killed or driven away."<sup>608</sup> Some Becwana tribes suffocated twins, generally by filling their mouth with cow-dung; and so did the Bawenda, who live in the north-east corner of the Transvaal.<sup>609</sup> Adjoining the Bawenda country on the east is the home of the Thonga clans, of whom Junod writes:<sup>610</sup> "Customs regarding twins vary from one clan to another. If in one tribe they are put to death, in others their advent is considered an event of great happiness. This is the case in *Tembe* and *Maputju*, where it is said that women wish for twins, and, if certain mothers have had that good fortune, others ask them for some of the fat with which they smeared their bodies, hoping by the use of the same ointment to obtain a like happy result." In three Thonga clans, he tells us, both twins are allowed to live; but formerly the feebler of them was strangled or allowed to die of starvation. On the day of her delivery, a purifying mixture is poured over the mother and her babes, the whole village being under taboo and not allowed to taste food till this lustral rite has been performed; the mother's hut and its chattels are burnt; and she is banished to a hastily-constructed quarantine-shelter outside the village. Her defilement is worse than that of a widow, and her final cleansing a much more difficult affair; and when all ritual requirements have been complied with and she is eventually permitted to return to her village, a new hut is built for her and furnished with new utensils, almost as if she were a new wife. A significant feature of her first purification, as practiced by one of these clans, is that her neighbors weave the rain-charms over her and her babes; and

<sup>606</sup> EK. 202.

<sup>607</sup> *Forty Years Among the Zulus* by Rev. Josiah Tyler, p. 104.

<sup>608</sup> TSA2. 206.

<sup>609</sup> R. BAAS., 1905, iii. 203.

<sup>610</sup> LSAT. ii. 400.

Junod invites attention to the fact that twins are attributed to the direct interference of a supernatural sire, whom the Thonga call *Tilo* (which Junod translates 'Heaven'), and that the day after their birth "nobody tills the ground, fearing that it would prevent the rain from falling."<sup>611</sup> Is it not likely that the burning of the hut and its chattels<sup>612</sup> came into the ritual before these Thonga clans had mercifully substituted banishment for butchery—at a period when the taboos of death always fell speedily upon the belongings of an unhappy mother of twins?

In Mashonaland "twins were done to death (and sometimes still are) by old women, who put them in a pot and choked them with hot ashes. Their bodies were buried in water or in a swamp. A fine of a beast was payable by their father to the Chief."<sup>613</sup>

In the first week of December, 1910, a Matabele man and his two wives were tried at the Circuit Court in Bulawayo for burying alive the twin children of one of the women; and the newspaper report of the trial contained the statement that in a case of triplets the mother is killed as well as all three children.<sup>614</sup> The Bulawayo correspondent of *The Times* sent the following to his London office, dating it Aug. 16 [1928]: "Two cases were before the Court here today of natives murdering twins in accordance with native law. It is the belief of the blacks that to kill twins ensures a good rainfall, the process adopted being strangulation with a grass rope, placing the bodies of the victims in a pot, and throwing them into a river. The parents in these cases are not accused, but the grandparents and a mother-in-law are; one mother, however, said that she did not object. She had not fed the children since their birth, as it was against native law. This custom has been followed here for many years. One of the cases before the Court today having occurred several years ago, the Judge said it was undesirable to go back too far, or half the natives in the country would be in Court. He passed sentence of death in each case, but expressed the view that it was not likely to be carried out. The custom, he explained, was one which Europeans were seeking to eradicate, but the accused in each

<sup>611</sup> LSAT. ii. 394-400.

<sup>612</sup> See my p. 136.

<sup>613</sup> MLC. 11, 46.

<sup>614</sup> Bo. 104.

case had pleaded that they were unaware that they were committing any criminal act; they were acting according to their law."<sup>615</sup>

Twins are not killed by the Barotse, nor thought unlucky. Triplets are bad: one is killed and two left alive, because "the mother has only two breasts."<sup>616</sup>

Masters mentions that in the part of Northern Rhodesia where he dwelt, twins were destroyed together with the mother, or if the mother was spared she was excommunicated and turned out to starve. He says, "A Rhodesian mother, living within the bounds of civilisation, was roasted alive with her twin babies, as recently as 1902."<sup>617</sup>

The Bakaonde (in the north-west corner of Northern Rhodesia) require the parents of twins to take them through the village, and every villager must give them some small gift; some days later the father is received by the chief with some ceremony, and makes him a present, and the chief gives a present to the twins, saying, "Now that this is done they will be able to visit me, and I can eat food cooked by their mother."<sup>618</sup>

When a Lunda woman bears twins, the spirit *Ubwango* must be propitiated or the twins will die. The 'doctor' presiding over this spirit gives medicine to the parents, who then walk about naked and receive small presents from the villagers. Then the 'doctor' names the twins, calling the first *Mbuyu*, and the second *Kapya*, irrespective of sex, and marks all those present at the ceremony with white rings round their eyes and white marks on the chest.<sup>619</sup>

In the Katanga district, the father of twins is the only male who is allowed to enter the hut in which a girl is secluded whilst undergoing the puberty rites.<sup>620</sup> At Msidi's (it is probably a Basanga custom, though Arnot is not explicit on that point) twins are not only allowed to live, but the people delight in them.<sup>621</sup> The Luba like a woman who has borne twins to fix the

<sup>615</sup> *The Times Weekly Edition*, Aug. 23, 1928.

<sup>616</sup> BRT. 62.

<sup>617</sup> WR. 122.

<sup>618</sup> WBA. 49-50.

<sup>619</sup> WBA. 179.

<sup>620</sup> JHB. 155.

<sup>621</sup> G. 241.

foundation horn or post of their dovecotes, chicken-houses, goat-pens, and cattle-kraals, the idea being that this promotes fertility among the livestock.<sup>622</sup>

The Tumbuka, who live west of Lake Nyasa, rear twins with care; but at the time of their birth both father and mother are sent out of the village, and a shed is built for them in the bush, where they have to live for two months, under restrictions; and at the purification rites that mark their return to the community, the parents break a pot at the cross-roads.<sup>623</sup>

The Afungwe tribe, domiciled a degree or two further north, have a custom which suggests a somewhat similar interpretation to that of the Herero. Probably twins were once exposed in a basket at the cross-roads—a place where many Bantu tribes bury suicides, execute witches, etc.; but there came such a sweetening of manners in that community as made it possible to substitute rites of expurgation for exposure. After the umbilical cords have dropped off, “a procession headed by the medicine-man carrying the twins in a basket, wends its way to the cross-roads outside the village. The basket containing the twins is placed resting upon a small bed of stakes, but although spectators may view afar off, only the fathers of twins and women who have borne children are allowed to dance around it. There is much rejoicing, and the women wave about bunches of green leaves, but insult the father of the twins by vile curses, and sing obscene songs about the parents. The twins are then removed from the basket, which is left at the cross-roads. On return to the village the father of the twins kills a goat, and mixes the blood with a decoction made by the village doctor; with this he sprinkles the feet of the midwife. In the evening he makes a tour of the village, sprinkling the blood in front of each door, over the grain-bins, the pigeon-cots, and the goat-pen, and, lastly, over the cattle kraal. Unless these rites are performed the natives say that a blight will fall upon the village. Those villagers whose huts are not sprinkled would fall seriously ill and swell up all over, the grain would rot, and the live stock would die. The father of twins himself, unless he received medicine from the doctor,

<sup>622</sup> IHB. 125. See also 155.

<sup>623</sup> WPP. 148-49.

would assuredly die, and, if he refused to complete the ceremonies, he and his wife would be driven from the village."<sup>624</sup>

The Konde of north Nyasa permit twins to live, but regard their birth as the greatest of misfortunes. Both parents are banished to a hut outside the village, and must neither be heard nor seen for a month, after which they are purified with a fire-rite, suggestive of the purification of mourners,<sup>625</sup> and brought back into the village; but till another child is born, or else for about five years, they must not eat with people who have not had twins, and the mother must not pass behind anyone without warning them and receiving consent. All relatives are fumigated and aspersed when the parents are banished, and aspersed again after the parents return to the village.<sup>626</sup>

"The treatment of twins is different among the various tribes in this part of the country," says Weule,<sup>627</sup> referring to the plain between the Makonde plateau and the Rovuma River. "The Wayao welcome them with unmixed joy, while the Makonde look on their birth as a terrible event, to be averted if possible by all sorts of charms. But even here the parents are not so cruel as to kill them if they do come into the world; they are allowed to live and treated in the same way as by the Wayao, i.e., their clothing (such as it is) is always alike. If this were not done, it is believed that one of them would certainly die."

The Wazeguha (or Wazigula) who live on the east coast opposite Pemba and Zanzibar, taboo twins, deformed children, children born with teeth, and those who cut the upper teeth before the lower. "In such case their lot is quickly determined: an aged sorceress, filling the office of midwife, strangles the unfortunate little being under her arm by twisting its neck; then the body is enclosed in an earthen vessel and, thus shrouded, is thrown into the neighbouring forest where, in the space of a single night, bands of voracious ants remove its every trace."<sup>628</sup>

The Akikuyu regard twins as taboo only when they are the firstborn of their mother. "If a woman bears twins the first time she has children, the twins are *thahu*, and an old woman of the

<sup>624</sup> GPNR. 276.

<sup>625</sup> See pp. 203f.

<sup>626</sup> SRK. 46-47, 107, 302.

<sup>627</sup> NLEA. 283.

<sup>628</sup> RP. 153.



village, generally the midwife, stuffs grass in their mouths until they are suffocated and throws them out into the bush. If, however, a woman first bears a single child and then has twins they are not thrown out. If a cow or a goat bears twins the first time, the same practice is observed, and a necklace of cowries is placed round the neck of the mother. Some kill both mother and young.<sup>629</sup> The same writer states on another page that the "birth of twins is a great misfortune either to human beings or domestic animals, but only when it occurs the first time the woman or animal bears. . . . Formerly twin infants were always suffocated, and in such cases were thrown into the bush by the old woman who assisted at the birth. This probably still occurs in the remoter parts of Kikuyu. . . . In order to free the mother from the curse, the husband hands her over to another man, and when she has borne to him, her husband takes her back."<sup>630</sup>

"The birth of twins is very unlucky" among the Akamba, who live west of Kikuyu, "and in former times one was thrown into the bush; the natives however assure me that this practice ceased before the Government was established. When, however, a cow calves twins it is still more unlucky, and such a cow has to be slaughtered at once together with its calves, otherwise nothing but sickness and death occurs in the village. The belief in this is still as strong as of old, and when a Mkamba kills his own cow and its calves one can imagine how dire is the fate he is thereby warding off."<sup>631</sup>

The Wachaga kill one of the twins and send the second and its mother back to her parents; they also kill a goat that bears twins the first time of bearing, and a sheep or cow that bears twins at any time. In all these cases the village must be purified.<sup>632</sup>

Still further west, in Kavirondo, the Wawanga forbid a woman who has borne twins to look at a cow in calf for fear the milk will dry up, or to cut grain at harvest-time or sow seed in the plantations, without first taking precautions to counteract evil effects; and if she pass by fermented grain when it is spread

<sup>629</sup> BBM. 114.

<sup>630</sup> BBM. 154-55.

<sup>631</sup> JRAI., 1913. p. 519., cf. AK. 61.

<sup>632</sup> K. 156, 202.

out to dry she must spit upon it, and take some in her mouth and put it back again, else the beer will be spoiled.<sup>633</sup> Among the Kamalamba (or Kebras), a tribe akin to the Bantu of Kavirondo, before the mother of twins can leave the lying-in hut, she must submit to special purificatory rites, which include the sacrifice of a black sheep and a mole.<sup>634</sup> The Walago (or El Bawgek) and the Wangoma (or Ngomamek), who live at the foot of Mount Elgon and are partly of Nandi extraction, generally throw their corpses out to the hyenas; but chiefs and the parents of twins are buried.<sup>635</sup>

Among the Bagesu of Mt. Elgon and the Busoga who live between that and the Nile, twins may not be removed from the spot where they were born till the medicine-man arrives. Then the Bagesu sacrifice to the gods and close the house to visitors, and on the third day perform special rites which aim at diverting any evil which may be attached to the twins.<sup>636</sup> The Basoga seclude mother and twins for two or even four months in a special hut; and when the twins are brought out, the father and mother shave their heads and pare their nails, and in some clans the clippings of hair and nails are secretly deposited in the country of some other tribe that the evil from the twins may go with them.<sup>637</sup> The Bambwa, on the western slopes of Ruwenzori, regard twins as sacred, but special purificatory rites must be performed after their birth, and the mother must be secluded for four months.<sup>638</sup>

The Banyoro, a Bantu-speaking people whose rulers are of the Hima aristocracy, deem twins propitious. They are a gift from the god of plenty, and the parents like them to be a boy and a girl. "Should a woman, however, give birth to triplets, she and her children, her father and her mother, are taken to some waste land at a distance, and all of them put to death. Such a birth is looked upon as a calamity, and if these people are left alive they would bring some curse upon the country. The father

<sup>633</sup> JRAL., 1913. p. 33.

<sup>634</sup> JRAL., 1913. p. 67. Burrowing animals are naturally associated with the underworld.

<sup>635</sup> JRAL., 1913. p. 62.

<sup>636</sup> GS. 25.

<sup>637</sup> GS. 122-23.

<sup>638</sup> GS. 142.

is not put to death, but he must never again look upon the king lest he should cause some evil to fall upon him. To guard against any such danger his eyes are gouged out."<sup>639</sup>

In Uganda, too, twins were sacred—the gift of the god Mukasa. Their birth was marked with elaborate ceremonies, which were brought to a close with the naming ceremony and two or three days of special festivity. The parents also were sacred; Mukasa bestowed blessings of fertility upon people, herds and crops wherever these parents went.<sup>640</sup>

Roscoe is quoted<sup>641</sup> as authority for the statement of a remarkable custom which is observed by the Bakena, a tribe of lake-dwellers on Lake Kioga, who regard twins as gifts of the gods. When the news is published that a woman has twins, "the father's sister's son hastens to the house, closes the front door, and makes a temporary opening at the back of the hut. He takes the leading part in the dancing ceremonies which follow. The afterbirth of the twins is put into two new cooking-pots and dried, and then taken ashore and left in the grass of one of the gardens." Roscoe mentions that the practice of closing the front door and making an opening at the back of the house is in vogue in Uganda also.<sup>642</sup>

Making a hole in the back wall of the hut is a funeral rite;<sup>643</sup> and one wonders whether this feature of the Bakena ritual does not date from a time when the hole was needed for the emergence of the undertakers, or for the entrance of their surrogates, the hyenas. The fact that the father's sister's son presides over the ritual, is curious; perhaps it points back to a time of transition from matrilineal to patrilineal usage, but, even so, its meaning is doubtful.

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO ETIQUETTE

Many taboos are based upon etiquette, the deference due from the young to the aged, or other social amenities. You must not enter a hut with your sandals on. You must not enter a hut

<sup>639</sup> SCA. 187.

<sup>640</sup> Bg. 64, 73.

<sup>641</sup> Bo. 122-23.

<sup>642</sup> Bo. 123.

<sup>643</sup> See pp. 136f.

in which people are sitting: you should knock at the door, or paw it, and leave them to invite you in if they wish you to enter. You must not intrude among people who are in their backyard: you should send a child to them with a message. Young people must not eat brains, spinal cord, marrow, tripe, chitterlings, kidneys, or fat; lest their hair grow white. Even the fat of roasted nuts is taboo to Lumbu children, though they may eat the raw nuts. Such foods are the perquisites of the old and toothless. The name of an absent person must not be uttered, lest his ears burn; his stool must not be sat upon, nor his sleeping-mat spread.

Some of these taboos go deeper than mere etiquette, and touch the moralities. For instance, it is taboo for a man to be present at the birth of a child; for parents to have intercourse before their child is weaned; and for a husband to sleep with his wife after she is past child-bearing.

In some tribes the social intercourse of men and women with their parents-in-law is limited by remarkable taboos.<sup>647</sup> A Kaonde man is never allowed to look his mother-in-law in the face.<sup>644</sup> Roscoe, speaking of the Bantu clans in Bunyoro, says:<sup>645</sup> "Among these agricultural clans the bridegroom may never look at or address his mother-in-law again after the day of his marriage, but must sit, on occasions such as this feast, [a meal which the bridegroom shares with his mother and mother-in-law as part of the wedding festivities] where he could not see her, and if he should meet her he must step out of the way and avert his eyes or hide himself from her sight." Among the Akamba after marriage, "there exists a rigid estrangement between the husband and his mother-in-law: they may never meet face to face, or enter a house by the same door; if by chance they meet on the road the son-in-law will pass by in the bush or turn his face away; on a breach of this rule a bull has to be sacrificed."<sup>646</sup> Hobley confirms these statements, but adds that a man can remove this prohibition by providing a public feast in the village whence he brought his bride, and publicly presenting his father-in-law and mother-in-law with a blanket apiece.<sup>648</sup> The Winamwango of Mwenzo, on

<sup>647</sup> Cf. SRK. 107-108.

<sup>644</sup> WBA. 61.

<sup>645</sup> SCA. 185.

<sup>646</sup> JRAI, 1913. p. 520.

<sup>648</sup> AK. 103. Cf. the Mashona custom mentioned below.

the watershed of the Zambesi and Congo, regard it as improper for a man to see his mother-in-law. The Lokele, who live along the Congo for about seventy-five miles above its junction with the Lomami, hold it taboo for a man to look upon his mother-in-law; and when occasion demands that he shall speak to her he must avoid mentioning many things by their ordinary names.<sup>649</sup> Torday states<sup>650</sup> that the Bahuana, who live between the Kwilu and the Kasai Rivers, tributaries of the Congo, have a similar taboo: a man must not enter the house of his parents-in-law, and if he meets them in the road he must turn aside into the bush to avoid them; but a wife is expected to visit her husband's parents and to show them great respect, though her husband's maternal uncle is taboo to her just as her parents are to her husband.<sup>651</sup> Traces of this practice are to be found among the Bakongo, also, and in the Lunda, Luba and Tanganyika countries. A very special taboo exists between a man of the Ila-speaking people and his wife's family, and between a woman and her husband's family.<sup>652</sup>

One wonders whether the Mashona custom to which Bullock refers<sup>653</sup> is not a more primitive and therefore explanatory form of this strange taboo. He says: "Prior to *masungiro*, the son-in-law dare not meet his wife's parents, who think their backs would be injured if he did." Now *masungiro* is really the formal acknowledgment, both by the husband and the parents-in-law, of the consummation of the marriage. It consists in a formal visit to the bride's parents by the newly-wedded pair, the observance of certain rites upon this occasion, and the presentation of a few goats to the girl's father by the bridegroom. After this public recognition, which takes place two or three months after marriage, it is no longer taboo for the man to meet his parents-in-law. Perhaps we may find a similar hint of the original significance of this taboo in the Basuto custom<sup>654</sup> which denies a young

<sup>649</sup> *Yakusu*. By H. Sutton Smith. pp. 52-53, and cf. ACC. 134 for similar Boloki custom.

<sup>650</sup> GGC. 683-84.

<sup>651</sup> It must be remembered that the maternal uncle was head of the family under the older matrilineal system of inheritance.

<sup>652</sup> IPNR. i. 340., ii. 60.

<sup>653</sup> MLC. 21., cf. 86.

<sup>654</sup> Bs. 201.

wife the privilege of looking her father-in-law in the face until she has presented him with a grandson.

These customs seem to have found their culmination among the Zulu-Kafir tribes. There, a young man must not eat from the common dish when visiting the home of his sweetheart; a husband must not drink milk nor eat porridge at his mother-in-law's kraal; a mother-in-law must not eat in her son-in-law's presence, though she may take Kafir-beer; and a wife is forbidden to associate with her father-in-law or her husband's male relatives in the ascending line, or to pronounce their names or any word that contains their names. This taboo of names involves considerable modification of the local vocabulary; because most personal names are derived from things, and these things have to be referred to by means of other terms. In Shooter's time, it was taboo for a man and his mother-in-law to enter the same hut, or to meet in the road without something between; and for a woman and her father-in-law to be in the same hut.<sup>655</sup>

Callaway speaks<sup>656</sup> of the custom of a wife avoiding the use of her husband's name and calling him 'Father-of-so-and-so' (naming his child) as part of the *hlonipa* custom which forbids a woman to mention her husband's name. It is taboo in many tribes for a woman to utter the name of her husband, as, indeed, it is in many other parts of the world; but other tribes, like the Becwana, would regard it as ill-bred for a wife to use any but this more honorific title for her husband, but not as taboo. A Lumbu woman may not call her husband by name till she has borne him two children.

It is strictly taboo for a Mwila to address his brother by the term which he commonly uses in speaking of him to another, the nearest English equivalent of which is 'my brother': children of the same father must address one another by name.<sup>657</sup>

However anomalous these avoidance customs between people and their parents-in-law may seem to us, we must not forget that they are widely distributed among the more backward races all over the world; and that it is therefore futile to seek their origin

<sup>655</sup> KNZC. 45.

<sup>656</sup> RSZ. 316 and cf. SRK. 96.

<sup>657</sup> IPNR. i. 318.

in local idiosyncrasies. It is quite possible, as Clodd suggests,<sup>658</sup> that the ceremonial avoidance by the husband is connected with his living with his wife's family, and *vice versa* as to the wife and her husband's family; but this has not yet been demonstrated.

#### TABOOS PERTAINING TO TRIBAL CEREMONIES

Great tribal ceremonies which are grounded in immemorial usage are always protected with many taboos; and since sexual relationships take a very large place in the thought of the Bantu, sexual taboos are inevitably associated with these rites, especially with rites that mark the arrival of sexual maturity.

The most significant feature of the Becwana New Year's Ceremonies (*go loma n̄waga*) is a taboo of polygamy and concubinage for one night, men being forbidden to spend the first night of the year with any but the head wife.<sup>659</sup> All active participants in the Becwana Initiation Ceremonies must abstain from cohabitation; and so must those who are engaged in war and in the hunting of big game.

Becwana Puberty Rites appear to be more elaborate than those of any other group of tribes, and the concomitant taboos are correspondingly stringent. Among the taboos of the Boys' Initiation Ceremonies, the neophytes must not smear the floor, or mix up mud, or shape a mud-wall, or sweep up refuse, or shave the head, or cook Kafir-corn, or handle malted grain, or put grain into the water to sprout, or put ashes of a fire into a potsherd. That is to say, these things are taboo for them while they are in the Initiation Camp. A woman must not enter the Camp, nor even get a distant glimpse of it or of the neophytes who are out on a hunting or other excursion. If it became known to the officiating regiment that a woman had unwittingly stumbled on the forbidden scene, they would kill her with a spear and thrust her body into the nearest hole. This taboo applies also to uncircumcised men; but during the first month of the ceremonies, the officiating regiment would compel a male intruder to undergo all the rites of the camp, though after the first

<sup>658</sup> MN. 61-2.

<sup>659</sup> See SB. 231ff.

month he would be too late for circumcision and would be killed. The neophytes are taboo till the ceremonies are ended and the last rite of purification complete. If a neophyte should escape before the end of the taboo period, he is pursued by the officiating regiment, speared at sight, and buried in a hole. Ellenberger records<sup>660</sup> an instance of a Basuto boy who escaped and managed to reach home, but was immediately killed by his father, who judged "that death alone could remove the shame put upon him and his house." Even the cooking of food for the neophytes is surrounded by taboos: no pregnant woman may cook such food; and women who cook it and carry it to the rendezvous where it is received by men of the officiating regiment, must shave their heads and avoid sexual intercourse as long as they are engaged in this service. And yet, strange to say, speech so filthy that it would not be tolerated in ordinary Native society is actually encouraged among those who are under these sexual taboos. Corresponding taboos apply to the Girls' Initiation Ceremonies, though the fact that these rites are performed in the town instead of in an isolated camp introduces inevitable modifications.

Fishing, when arranged by the community, partakes of the nature of a tribal rite, and is subject to taboos. Baila men "leave the villages and encamp on the river-bank, and until the fishing is over they are forbidden to have commerce with their wives or other women. If in the midst of the fishing a man should return home to take a bundle of fresh fish and should break the rule, the effect would at once be seen, for the next time the net was pushed along there would be no fish taken."<sup>661</sup>

Hunting is sometimes a tribal affair in which all the men take part, but is more frequently undertaken by voluntary parties of tribesmen, in which every member of the hunt must observe certain relevant taboos. In the Mweru-Bangweulu-Katanga district,<sup>662</sup> "hunter's taboos affect also the hunter's wife, and the laws pertaining to success in the chase are numerous and intricate. Inviolable faithfulness of husband and wife during the former's absence in the hunting field is one of the first and most

<sup>660</sup> HB. 284.

<sup>661</sup> IPNR. i. 169.

<sup>662</sup> IHB. 94 and cf. SRK. 133-34.



important laws for hunters if they are to have luck. If a woman is unfaithful during her hunter husband's absence, the latter is exposed to failure, danger from wild animals, and even death. If the elephant charges and the hunter is killed, the woman is tried for murder on the ground of concealed adultery and breaking the taboo, and is at once executed." In the old Congo kingdom,<sup>663</sup> "there must be no adultery either by the man with the gun, or his wife. The test of a man's faithfulness in this is whether he hits or misses when he shoots. Should he habitually miss, he is unquestionably guilty. He is fined and expelled from the club."

Since all Bantu tribes regard war as one of the greatest of tribal functions, it is naturally compassed about with taboos. While on the war-path, Bakwena warriors must not touch the skin of a duyker;<sup>664</sup> must not be accompanied by a dog; must not eat wild fruits or berries; must not pass over a stick lying across the path, but must go around it; must not point the spear or the muzzle of the gun in any direction but that in which they are going; must not eat food found in a captured village, nor take any plunder from it till the leader of the expedition announces that the conquest is complete; and must avoid sexual intercourse. There must be no flogging in a war-party: he who points his spear backwards, for instance, is sent back, not beaten, though corporal punishment may be inflicted upon offenders at other regimental musters.

I have mentioned the Bakwena for the sake of precision; but these taboos differ but little from those of other tribes of the Becwana group, and may be taken as a general exemplification of Bantu practice.

In Uganda<sup>665</sup> there was a taboo on the sexual intercourse of warriors till the first spoil had been taken and the general had performed a ceremony of confirming the expedition; and even chiefs who took two or three wives to do their cooking, observed this taboo.

Among the Baila,<sup>666</sup> "all sexual intercourse was avoided, and the women were instructed to remain chaste while their husbands

<sup>663</sup> WBT. 88.

<sup>664</sup> The duyker is not the totem of the Bakwena.

<sup>665</sup> Bg. 352-53.

<sup>666</sup> IPNR. i. 176.

were away fighting, lest harm should befall them.<sup>667</sup> They were also forbidden to throw anything at one another for fear lest their relatives should be speared, or to imitate any kind of blow. They were also forbidden to dance, the period until the safe return of the warriors was assured being one rather of mourning than rejoicing."

## TABOOS PERTAINING TO SLAYERS

According to Bantu law, a murderer or some other member of his social group must pay the penalty of his deed; and the penalty is theoretically a life for a life, though under certain circumstances the forfeited life may be redeemed. These laws and the sanctions behind them are regarded as divine, although favoritism or fear sometimes enables a murderer to escape by subterfuge. But the taboo of the slayer is quite apart from what may be called the penalty of the common law. A person who sheds human blood at the bidding of a despot, may possibly escape taboo upon the ground that he is an officer of justice;<sup>668</sup> or if he has given the fatal blow to a victim offered in sacrifice or doomed to be buried with a notable, he may shelter himself under the plea that he was performing an act of piety. These are doubtful questions. Further, it is well-nigh impossible to ascertain whether this taboo rests upon those who take human life without shedding human blood; the number of instances in which care has been taken to avoid shedding the blood of one whom it has been decided to kill, like the starving and burning of the royal brothers mentioned in the footnote below, would seem to indicate the contrary. As far as I know, there is no taboo upon those who destroy such infants as their tribe deems dangerous; nor upon those who place small-pox patients or very aged people where they are likely to become the prey of hunger or of wild beasts. Human life is treated with great levity in Africa. In some tribes secret poisoning is all too common; but it is classed with witchcraft; and when the guilty person is discovered, he is

<sup>667</sup> So with the Konde, SRK. 103.

<sup>668</sup> In Uganda, where it had long been customary for each new king to starve or burn nearly all his royal brothers, a prince who made war upon his brother, the king, executed one of his soldiers who, by slaying the king in battle, had broken the taboo upon the shedding of royal blood. Bg. 189, 336-37, 348.

either executed at once or compelled to submit to the ordeal. In either case there can be no question of taboo: if he is guilty of witchcraft, his dearest friends will hound him down; and if he survives the ordeal, he is absolved from the charge by a tribunal that is higher than human. Much intensive and extensive work remains to be done by explorers of Bantu thought before we can confidently attribute any particular doctrine to all these tribes, but it appears likely that a taboo of the slayer prevails in every one of them.

Though the Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast are not Bantu, they are so closely related that students of Bantu lore cannot afford to overlook their customs. Cardinal, writing of these people, says:<sup>69</sup> "After committing murder certain ceremonies must be performed. Until these are done the offender may not enter his wife's hut nor hold any communication with her nor with his children. Relatives and strangers alike will not speak to him but express their desires by signs. Food is brought him by a former murderer, and until the third day he must sleep in company with other murderers on the midden of his ancestors. A cow or sheep is then slain and one of the horns is encircled with a piece of skin from the neck of a fowl and skin of a cat. On this horn a little of the blood of the sacrifice is poured and the meal is divided among the former murderers. They then all go to the midden, and after cutting the man's hair in the form of a cross from his forehead to the neck and from ear to ear, they place on his head a mixture from certain grasses gathered in the bush. They then eat together. A death from misadventure does not require this ceremony. A murderer can be known because he must wear on his neck a little piece of wood." In principle—details differ even among Bantu tribes—this agrees with the Bantu taboo of slayers; and one would like to hear from this acute observer whether the custom which he describes is applied to all who have taken human life, or only to those who have slain their victim. In current speech we scarcely ever find it necessary to distinguish between the two words 'slayer' and 'murderer'; and one suspects that writers who refer to the taboo of murderers may be describing the taboo of slayers.

<sup>69</sup> NTG. 93.

Smith's careful statement of the *Baila* idea is above criticism. "There is something uncanny about the shedding of blood," he says;<sup>670</sup> "it is *tonda* (taboo), it is *malweza* (an atrocity, a horrible thing), in certain cases if not all; something which sets the mysterious world-forces against you." That is the Bantu notion. Moreover, the taboo is so stringent that it applies even to warriors who slew their foes in defence of their own lives and liberties, or in fair fight upon the field of battle.

According to the Becwana usage, such warriors are taboo to the whole civil population till they are purified from their 'uncleanness': they must not enter their homes nor eat certain kinds of food. Of course, they belong to their regiment and there is necessary intercourse between them and their comrades till the army returns; but one of the first events after arrival is the purification of the army from the contaminations of the battlefield. This general regimental purification is, however, not enough for those who have slain a foe; they are separated men, and must be purged by special rites. We shall discuss the ritual of purification later; but the great dread of the slayer, like that of the widow and widower, is rumbling of the bowels; and as a prophylactic against this calamity the magician takes the large bowel of an ox, inserts occult powders into the flesh attached to its lower extremity, ties both ends and inflates it, and then strikes the slayer over the small of the back, on the sides, and on the bowels, with this inflated intestine.

Smith says:<sup>671</sup> "Temporary, transient, possession is conceived to take place in the case of a person who commits murder. The uncomfortable feelings which seize such a person, which we should call remorse and attribute to conscience, they attribute to the ghost of the murdered man . . . The ghost is supposed to take up its lodging in the region of the epigastrium and can be expelled by the taking of an emetic or by cupping. The physical basis of such a belief is, of course, that the solar plexus becomes disturbed by excitement of the higher centres." He is evidently referring to the slayer and the ghost of the slain, and what he says of the disturbance resulting from excitement of the higher centres is interpretatively useful; but the idea of remorse

<sup>670</sup> IPNR. i. 414; see i. 347 for the above bracketed definitions.

<sup>671</sup> IPNR. ii. 136. Cf. also i. 415.

is inadmissible in the case of warriors. Slayers who have to be purified in a special manner when the regiment returns, regard themselves, and are regarded by their fellows, as the heroes of the fight. They glory in their brave deeds; but they have no doubt suffered from the excitement of the encounter.

Junod is to the point here. "To have killed an enemy on the battlefield entails an immense glory for the slayers," he says;<sup>672</sup> "but that glory is fraught with great danger." And he proceeds to report that in Thonga tribes the spirit of the slain is thought likely to take his revenge on the slayer by reddening his eyes and affecting his head, till it drives him, maybe, to insanity; and that the slayer is therefore taboo till his purification is complete—a process which takes some days.

The same taboo is evidently observed by the Wawanga, in the Victoria Nyanza district. A warrior of this tribe who has slain a foe in battle, may not enter his hut till he has rubbed cowdung on the cheeks of the women and children of the village and purified himself by the sacrifice of a goat, a strip of skin from the forehead of which is bound about his right wrist for the following four days.<sup>673</sup>

Much the same custom prevails among the Akikuyu, in Kenya Colony. Hobley does not call it a taboo of slayers; but he does say<sup>674</sup> *that upon the return of the army, the elders who preside over sacrifices shaved the heads of warriors who had killed an enemy in battle, took away the hair and hid it in the woods, and smeared the face of each warrior with a line of white earth; and that the spear which had done the killing was also smeared with white earth. All of which points to this taboo. He says, also,*<sup>675</sup> *that no member of the family of a murdered man may eat food out of the same dish or drink beer with any member of the family of the murderer, till the ceremonial of compensation has been properly carried out—a ceremonial consisting in the payment of wergild, the slaughter of a male sheep with appropriate ritual, the sharing by the two families of what looks like a sacrificial meal, and the blunting of the weapon which did*

<sup>672</sup> LSAT. i. 453ff.

<sup>673</sup> JRAL., 1913., p. 47.

<sup>674</sup> BBM. 246.

<sup>675</sup> BBM. 230.

the deed and throwing it into a deep pool in the nearest river. Here he is referring to the slaying of a man in a private brawl; but he does not tell us whether the slayer is taboo to his own kith and kin.

Among the Akamba, "if one man kills another he cannot cohabit with his wife until the elders have met and made medicine, which is principally derived from the *Solanum* fruit. This medicine is rubbed over the man's body and is evidently a purification ceremony."<sup>676</sup>

"Among many tribes the weapon used to inflict death upon any one is in some way purified; among the Akikuyu it is blunted, and I believe some such observance is almost universal among African tribes. The performance of such acts originates in the idea that the weapon carries with it misfortune or fatality, and so it is with the Akamba. The weapon once used in murder continues to be a means of further destruction, but here there is no ceremony, no medicine or magic that can abate its fatal spirit: henceforth and for all time it will continue to kill by the hand of its owner, no matter what he does with it. Since there is no way of ridding oneself of this curse, the Mkamba has recourse to craft and cunning; he will lay the weapon on a path or place where a passer-by is likely to see it. Once the finder has picked it up its bane falls upon him and the first owner is free from it."<sup>677</sup>

Among the Konde people of Nyasa, "the spear with which a murder has been committed is cut off short at the haft, and the blade bent over with a stone, and it is then hung up in the roof of the house of a relative of the murderer."<sup>678</sup>

#### TABOOS OF DOUBTFUL MEANING

There are obscure customs connected with well-known taboos, and there are recondite taboos that perplex even the people who believe in them.

The totem animal is taboo for those of that totem, but not for others. It must not be eaten, killed, or touched; and if the hoe

<sup>676</sup> AK. 102.

<sup>677</sup> JRAL., 1913., p. 526.

<sup>678</sup> SRK. 89.

or other implement is the totem, it is taboo to use it for a degrading purpose, such as to strike a dog with it. If a man should set a trap for game, and find one morning, to his dismay, that an antelope of the species which happens to be the totem of his clan has met its death therein, he will apologize profoundly to the carcase; but since the creature is dead, he will lasso it with a long cord and drag it to the larder of a neighbour who is of another totem, for the frugal soul cannot bear to see good meat wasted. "If the animal is hurtful, as the lion, for instance, it may not be killed without great apologies being made to it, and its pardon being asked. Purification is necessary after the commission of such sacrilege."<sup>679</sup> Since the crocodile is the totem of the Bakwena, and was the totem of the Bamangwato when the latter was a junior branch of the former tribe, it would seem that the following passage from Livingstone's pen<sup>680</sup> must refer to taboo of the totem: "In the Bamangwato and Bakwain tribes, if a man is either bitten or even has had water splashed over him by the reptile's tail, he is expelled his tribe. When on the Zouga we saw one of the Bamangwato living among the Bayeiye, who had the misfortune to have been bitten and driven out of his tribe in consequence . . . . If the Bakwains happened to go near an alligator they would spit on the ground, and indicate its presence by saying, '*Boleo ki bo*'—'*There is sin.*' They imagine the mere sight of it would give inflammation of the eyes; and, though they eat the zebra without hesitation, yet if one bites a man he is expelled the tribe, and obliged to take his wife and family away to the Kalahari." As far as I know, the zebra has never been a totem of the Bakwena; but creatures that have no apparent connection with existing or traditional totems, are taboo for certain communities. The wild dog, or Cape hunting dog (*Lycaon pictus*), is protected by taboo notions in some communities. The Mashona say<sup>681</sup> that these dogs must not be killed, as they are 'the dogs of God'. To drive them away it is only necessary to begin stripping bark from a tree as if to make rope, and they will run away lest they should be tied up. The Becwana also call them 'God's dogs,' and used to believe that he

<sup>679</sup> Bs. 211.

<sup>680</sup> MTR. 255.

<sup>681</sup> MLC. 84.

who injured one of them would be stricken with madness or death.

The droppings of either of two birds would render Becwana young people so unclean that no one but their senior maternal uncle could perform the purification rite. One of these is the hawk which the Becwana call *nkgodi*; the other is the familiar little creature with a black back and yellow belly, akin to the swallow, which nests under the eaves, and is called either *mole-tasake*, because it stays in the kraal after the cattle have gone forth to pasture, or *moselakate*, from its habit of pecking seeds of wild melon (*mokate*) from the cow-dung, though its favorite food is flies. If the droppings of a kite or a crow should fall on one of the Akikuyu, he would be taboo, and would have to shave his head, bathe in a river, and get the elders to kill a sheep for his purification and fasten a strip of its skin on his wrist.<sup>682</sup> The *ingqungqulu* is said to be larger than any other bird found in Zululand. If that bird drops its dung on a Zulu, it is a matter of great consequence to him, and some evil will befall him if he is not purified by the doctor at once.<sup>683</sup>

The Mashona say that if a puff-adder is found in the lands, it must not be killed or the crops will not ripen; but if it be left unmolested, a heavy crop will ensue.<sup>684</sup>

A Tembu mother and child are shaved at weaning; and sometimes when a child is sick they cut off the first joint of the little finger. Shaving the head is often connected with taboo; but the amputation of a finger-joint has not yet received a satisfactory explanation, although it seems to have been practised in Europe in Aurignacian times.<sup>685</sup> It is doubtful whether this mutilation of the hand is connected with taboo. Bushman rites are still shrouded in mystery; but the reason why these modern paleolithic Africans sometimes cut off the terminal joint of the little finger is said to be a belief that by so doing they secure abundance of food in the future life.<sup>686</sup> A cognate Bantu practice is

<sup>682</sup> BBM. 116.

<sup>683</sup> RSZ. 408.

<sup>684</sup> MLC. 85.

<sup>685</sup> Burkitt's *Prehistory*, pp. 198, 220, 308.

<sup>686</sup> ECSA. 63. Arbousset says (NET. 357) that if a Bushman "woman loses her first infant, and another is borne by her, she cuts off the end of its little finger and throws it away"; but he states, also, that he was assured by a Mosuto who grew



also said to bear upon the future life. For instance, when a man of the Baila dies childless, it is customary to "cut off his little finger and little toe, and enclose a piece of charcoal in his fist, before burying him. Their reason for doing this is obscure. They suppose that it will either prevent him being reborn, or if it fails to that extent, at least they will be able to recognize him by the absence of these members should he return to earth."<sup>687</sup> An old Bakwena mentor of mine told me that when a woman died childless after five or six years of married life, it used to be customary to amputate one of her arms at the shoulder and lay it alongside her in the grave, the technical phrase for this operation being 'to deliver her of a child'; but the only explanation of the practice that had ever reached him was a belief that if the barren woman were buried without this attention her friends would be punished with miscarriages. He mentioned, also, that a childless man was buried with a charred log from his hearth between his legs; but he thought that was merely a symbol of the fact that having died childless he had extinguished the fire in his courtyard.

There was a custom, which is discontinued in all the tribes of the extreme south, that when a man falls in war and his widow is taken by his nearest kinsman, her first child must not be allowed to live, or her husband would surely die.<sup>688</sup>

One of my old Becwana instructors was greatly puzzled by two taboos, which he declared to be incomprehensible. One was, you must not eat the sinews at the back of the neck of an animal, or you will be cursing your father; but this sinew is not edible. Another was, you must not eat the marrow of the trochanter of an ox, or you will get an evil disease of the belly; but there is no marrow in the trochanter. Possibly these sayings are only meant to puzzle youngsters, like our remark about the lions of Trafalgar Square drinking at the fountain "when they hear the clock strike the hour of midnight."

Among the Batonga of the Zambesi and some other tribes, a leper must not eat salt meat; a person suffering with ulcers must

up among Bushmen, "that with some of them this usage is a destinative (distinctive?) mark of caste, and consequently is practised on all their children."

<sup>687</sup> IPNR. ii. 1.

<sup>688</sup> LA. 156.

not eat goat's flesh; the relatives of a blind man must not eat *nyouti* grain, nor the relatives of a leper, mealies. Meat that has not been dried is taboo to people of the Lumbu tribe who are suffering from chest or stomach troubles. A Zulu girl about to marry must not eat sweet-reed nor parched maize. A newly-married Kafir woman must not take milk at her own kraal till an animal has been sacrificed for her; and after her confinement she must not eat meat, nor anything baked (not even bread) till she leaves her hut.

It is taboo to fell certain kinds of trees except in certain months, and to fell some others except by the special order or permission of the chief. These taboos may be connected with forgotten tree-totems, but there appears to be no tradition of former Bantu tree-totems, though there are a few customs which it is hard to explain without that assumption.

#### TABOO DAYS, OR 'SABBATHS'

We have already seen that the day after a hailstorm, and the day after the first shower of the season, is taboo; and that the day when a villager dies is a taboo day to all the dwellers in his village. The day of a birth is, however, as sacred as the day of a death; and so is the day of a great tribal festival, such as the New Year Rites, or of a great tribal act of worship, such as the Rain Rites and the Consecration of the Army. But taboo days are not essentially days for worship, nor days of sloth, slumber and gloom. The more laborious occupations of village life are avoided: tillage, for instance, the felling of trees, the building or repairing of houses or fences, hunting, fishing, and even the threshing of corn on the home threshing-floor; but pastoral pursuits and women's domestic duties are allowable, and so are the lighter crafts with which men pass their spare hours, such as wood-carving, wire-twisting, and kaross-making; and people are as frisky and clubbable on these days as on others.

Most Bantu tribes observe a lunar 'sabbath',<sup>689</sup> though some keep one day of the lunar month and some another. Many tribes hallow the day following the evening on which the new moon is

<sup>689</sup> See also pp. 81ff.

first seen; but some keep the fifth day after its appearance, some the eighth, and some the ninth. This perplexing variation of lunar 'sabbath' is particularly noticeable in the Masbona group of tribes, and may be due to the composite nature of that group—Karanga, Shona, Luyi, etc.

A time-worn Karanga tradition has it that every fourth day used to be a taboo day for their fathers. Although seven weeks of four days each come as near to the lunar month ( $29\frac{1}{2}$  days) as four weeks of seven days each, this is an unusual division of time; and unfortunately my search for more information proved fruitless. I met many Makaranga who knew of the tradition, but not one who had heard anything more concerning it. A four-day week is common in the old Kongo Kingdom.<sup>693</sup> The Bavili of Loango still observe every fourth day as a 'sabbath', and their prohibitions are more strenuous than those of most tribes: "the prince or father may have no connection with his wife, he may not go outside of his town, he may not hold a palaver. The doctor of Nganga Bilongo may not bleed his patient."<sup>690</sup> In Krapf's time it was customary for the Wanika to rest from their labours every fourth day, and to spend it in feasting and carousing.<sup>691</sup>

It would be interesting to discover the origin and significance of these sacred days, but that is a difficult region to explore. The Becwana say that the crops would not ripen if any work were done in the lands on a taboo day—a belief that is shared by most Bantu. To understand such a notion it is necessary to remember that the ripening of crops is regarded as a boon from the spirit-world, and that the dynastic spirits are tutelary deities (or patron saints) of the gardens and fountains. Some Mashona say that they observe their particular day of the lunar month because that is the day on which all great chiefs die; which may possibly explain why the ninth day of the new moon is called Mgari's 'sabbath.' Other Mashona attribute their new moon 'sabbaths' to a command received by their ancestors from some evil spirits, whom they fear to offend. Fear of offending spirits, good or bad, is the usual Bantu motive for respecting sacred

<sup>693</sup> APB. 130, 199, 308.

<sup>690</sup> RP. 161.

<sup>691</sup> TRML. 82, 365.

days; but the fact that the Mashona call these spirits 'evil spirits' suggests that their date of the lunar 'sabbath' is older than their occupation of the country, and that their conquering forefathers feared to desecrate a day that had already become sacred to the spirits of some dispossessed dynasty.<sup>692</sup>

That anyone who works on the 'sabbath' of the first thunder-storm of the season will be killed by 'the bird of heaven' (lightning),<sup>694</sup> is a doctrine which the Mashona hold in common with most of their own race; and it indicates that the guardians of this particular 'sabbath' are the tribal or territorial gods of fertility, that is to say, the ancestral spirits of either their own dynasty or that of an earlier and dispossessed tribe. In a similar manner the Lumbu connect the 'sabbath' after rain with Leza; and the Akikuyu and Akamba<sup>695</sup> regard the day on which sacrifice for rain is offered to Engai as a 'sabbath.'

All these 'sabbaths' are 'unlucky days'; but that may mean nothing more than the belief that the spirits will show their displeasure by spoiling any enterprise that violates these sacred days, and that the safe course, therefore, is to do nothing of any importance.

#### TABOO AND ILL-LUCK

It is sometimes hard to distinguish between taboo and ill-luck; I mean that in a small percentage of incidents one cannot foresee whether a Native will say 'taboo' or 'ill-luck'.<sup>696</sup> Reference has been made<sup>697</sup> to certain cairns by the roadside which demand respect from passing travelers; I have frequently been told that it is 'taboo' to pass one of these without adding something to the heap, but again and again my informant has said that it is 'unlucky' to do so. The Becwana believe that it is a bad business for the master of a herd when one of his cattle drinks its own urine, sucks its own teats, bleeds at the nose, ejects its cud, has its horns bored by carpenter-beetles, or beats the ground with its tail. The sooner such an uncanny animal is got rid of the better. Now, such a beast is usually described as 'unlucky', but sometimes one

<sup>692</sup> See SB. 202f.

<sup>694</sup> See pp. 91ff.

<sup>695</sup> BBM. 47, 55.

<sup>696</sup> See p. 196f.

<sup>697</sup> See pp. 24ff.

hears that it is 'taboo.' Our discussion of the Becwana terms must be reserved for a future page,<sup>698</sup> but the link between the two notions is probably to be found in the fact that everybody *avoids* both tabooed and unlucky things. 'Ill-luck' is a milder term than 'taboo', and is commonly applied to mishaps, though not always. For instance, there are two trees<sup>699</sup> in Bechuanaland whose branches are so numerous and so closely interwoven that it is difficult to climb into them, and not easy to fall out. If a boy falls from one of these trees, he is said to be 'unlucky', and his ear must be cut so that the blood falls on the ground and the ill-luck with it. On the other hand, an untimely or abnormal birth is always described by the stronger term. Probably the distinction is to be found in the belief that a foolhardy person may do an unlucky thing without involving his neighbors; but the community must protect itself against one who has violated a taboo.

#### LUCK AND OMENS

Innumerable omens inflame the imagination and control the action of tribesmen throughout Bantu Africa. Every tribe has its own assortment, and its own interpretation, though identical omens similarly interpreted are often found in tribes which are widely separated from one another both in language and in proximity; and even where they differ in detail Bantu omens are all of a piece.

Omens are usually understood to be signs of future events; but the Bantu interpret some of them as intimations that calamity has already befallen one's distant friends. As signs of future events, they are sometimes said to be 'lucky' and sometimes 'unlucky.'

If a hare crosses a hunter's path, he will see no game; and wise men refuse to spend their strength in chasing the wind. There is something sinister about the owl, the bat, and the hyena: they bode ill to the village they visit. Something will befall a man or his friend if he sees a mole, an ant-bear, or a spring-hare in the open at midday.<sup>700</sup> If red-ants (*lorwe*) are seen at night, you may

<sup>698</sup> See pp. 196ff.

<sup>699</sup> Called *mopipi* and *motlopi*.

<sup>700</sup> These are all creatures of the night.

expect to hear of a death, or, worse still, of some such impending calamity as war or disease. A reptile which the Becwana call *seleka*, is said to have neither eyes nor mouth; to be able to travel in either direction without turning; to have a kind of claw at each end of its body, the scratch of which is poisonous; and to be about eighteen inches long and of a blackish, or sometimes reddish colour. If you see one of these blindworms, it is an omen of death to you or your family. To see a puff-adder or a python crossing your path, is to lose a friend by death very shortly.<sup>701</sup> The Becwana describe the *moko* as a very large maggot-like creature, white, with a reddish head, which lives in the ground.<sup>702</sup> If you see one of these creatures crossing your path, you may be sure that a relative of yours is already dead. When a star pierces the clouds in the west, it is telling of the death of a chief, or a person of importance in the town. Halley's comet caused as much consternation among the Bantu in 1910 as it did among Europeans in the Middle Ages. They 'knew' that a comet presages the death of a chief, and as this was a very large comet it must refer to a very great chief; and when the flags at half-mast announced the death of King Edward VII. they pointed triumphantly to the reliability of their prognostications. If a man sees a snake climbing a tree and hissing, he knows that the snake is trying to sound an alarm; and when he reaches his village and finds that one of the villagers has died, he at once exclaims: "Oh, that is what that snake was saying!" When a man makes a bad shot time after time, and the bucks stand and look at him before running away, he says: "I saw that they were wanting to warn me of something;" and if upon arriving home he hears of the death of a friend, he knows at once what the bucks meant, though he could not make it out at the time. To hap upon a dead spring-hare or a dead baboon, is unlucky for a traveller; and if a giraffe or an eland screams after it has received its death-wound, it is most unlucky for the hunter.

Two sayings which find credence in the North of England<sup>703</sup> are that it is unlucky when meat shrinks in the pot while boiling, but a sign of prosperity when it swells; and that if a cock crows

<sup>701</sup> Cf. SB. 161, 164.

<sup>702</sup> Especially in cattle-kraals (the burial-places of Becwana patriarchs).

<sup>703</sup> CPP. 549.

on the threshold, you may expect a stranger. Both these omens are common among the Bantu. When hunters are cooking the flesh of their quarry, they take the former as a sure sign of the fortune awaiting the hunt. They have other sure signs, of course; such as if the muscles twitch after a buck has been skinned, it is a sign that another buck will be killed that day.<sup>704</sup> If the little yellow hawk precedes the hunter and sits on the branch of a tree in front of him, it is an omen of good luck. A twitching of the muscles behind a hunter's shoulder means that that shoulder will carry game before long; and the watering of his mouth makes him sure that he will soon eat venison. It is a sign of good luck to see a striped snake on the move, or a puff-adder or a python at rest. These are lucky omens. But a leader who stumbles and falls as he sets out on a serious undertaking must either turn back or proceed alone, unless he possesses the ready wit with which Julius Caesar is said to have saved the situation when he landed on the North African coast, and William the Conqueror when he leaped upon the southern shore of England.

If the blue crane is heard crying high up in the sky where it cannot be seen, it is a sign of an abundance of rain. Naturalists may possibly place this and a few similar omens in a different category; but then naturalists do not look out on life through the eyes of believers in magic.

I have quoted Becwana omens simply because I am more familiar with them; but similar notions, with minor differences, are to be found in all Bantu tribes. Take a few of those that Bullock heard in Mashonaland. If a duiker or a hare crosses the path of one who is starting on a journey, it is unlucky; or if an owl hoots or a koodoo bellows, or if a 'go-away bird' does not call out when passed.<sup>705</sup> It forbodes the death of a hunter if an eland that he has wounded looks at him while the tears are running from its eyes.<sup>706</sup> If a blindworm appears on the path, it forebodes death to the traveller or to one of his family; but,

<sup>704</sup> Cf. MLC. 84.

<sup>705</sup> MLC. 89. In the United States if a black cat scuttles across the line ahead, some unflinching engine-drivers expect a crash before the run is completed; or if a black cat crosses the path in front of a traveller, it is wiser for him to turn back, and not a few intelligent citizens who 'don't really believe in such things', see no earthly use in running risks that may just as well be avoided!

<sup>706</sup> MLC. 83.

strange to say, the omen may be averted if the traveller does not move till the blindworm has gone away.<sup>707</sup> It is very unlucky to see a mole outside its hole, or to find the insect called *gurgwi* in your hut, or to meet a black centipede in the dry season.<sup>708</sup> A bird's nest in the arable lands, especially that of the hammerkop, ensures a heavy crop; but if the crow builds there, the rainfall will be scanty.<sup>709</sup> If you meet a tortoise while hunting and tap it on the back with a stick or tie it to a tree by the leg, you will have good sport; some think it wiser to tie the tortoise to their belt till the buck is killed.<sup>710</sup>

Dr. Wilder, writing of the Ndaui people who live on both sides of the eastern border of Mashonaland,<sup>711</sup> mentions a few omens to which they pin their faith. Stubbing the toe tells of a feast or a quarrel at hand. When a rooster crows at the doorway, a friend will arrive. Itching feet are signs of a journey that cannot be avoided. Twitching of the under eyelid means the death of a friend, being a sign that tears are to flow. The hooting of an owl, the barking of a jackal, or the howl of a hyena near the kraal are signs that evil is at hand. Meeting a troop of baboons means danger ahead: a Native would turn back in face of such an omen if a hundred miles from home. A mole in the road and above ground indicates great danger on in front. A duiker running across the path and back again sends the traveller back to his home. To see a puff-adder moving means death for your friend or yourself. On the Shire Highlands in 1875, Macdonald found that it was a bad omen to strike one's foot against a stump at the beginning of a journey,<sup>712</sup> or to see a python crossing one's path, while a python at the side of the road betokened danger on that side. When a *sungula* (hare?) crossed the path, it meant that the chief would die.<sup>713</sup> It was an omen of ill-luck in Uganda to meet a woman when starting a journey, or to sneeze when preparing for a journey,<sup>714</sup> or to see either a snake crossing one's

<sup>707</sup> MLC. 89.

<sup>708</sup> MLC. 89.

<sup>709</sup> MLC. 86.

<sup>710</sup> MLC. 84.

<sup>711</sup> *Hartford Seminary Record*, Oct. 1907.

<sup>712</sup> Cf. SB. 259.

<sup>713</sup> A. i. 81-83.

<sup>714</sup> Cf. SB. 181n.



path or a bird flying over it in the early morning.<sup>715</sup> Kenneth Dundas was told that if the first person met had a firstborn child of the same sex as the traveller, it is a good omen; and that it is lucky to stumble with the left foot and unlucky to stumble with the right when going on a journey, though on the return trip the opposite holds good.<sup>716</sup> Additional examples can be culled from almost any book on Bantu Africa.<sup>717</sup>

Unlucky omens are for the most part unusual happenings,<sup>718</sup> such as a nocturnal creature making its appearance in the day-time, or an underground creature on the surface, or such sluggish beasts as puff-adders and pythons on the move, or a 'go-away' bird that does not utter its forbidding cry when a person appears; and others, such as having one's path crossed or barred, are happenings that a magically-minded man is sure to apply interpretatively to his journey. Lucky omens, on the other hand, are indications that nothing is disturbing the ordinary life of the lower creatures; that pythons and puff-adders are restfully digesting their prey and nimbler snakes gliding hither and thither, each according to its wont.

Here, I think, is a clue that will help us to thread our way along the labyrinthine paths of Bantu magic. Taboos, luck, and omens are interwoven in Bantu thought because they are all grounded in the belief that human life is at the mercy of a legion of veiled but puissant personalities whose danger-signals cannot be ignored with impunity, and that birds, beasts, and other creatures are more sensitive than men to the presence of these ghostly beings. The unwonted behaviour of an animal, like that of Balaam's ass, is of sinister significance because it is attributed to the creature's awareness of a commanding presence that man's senses are too dull to perceive. The harbinger of evil is not thought to be itself a source of danger: it would not act like that if left to itself; hence the cautionary value of its action. Now if the wild things of the woods are so susceptible to the mysterious beings with which animists people their world, it is as reasonable to take warning from a bird of ill omen or the strange be-

<sup>715</sup> Bg. 17.

<sup>716</sup> JRAL., 1913, pp. 19ff.

<sup>717</sup> See AK. 104; SRK. 240.

<sup>718</sup> Cf. WBA. 244-45.

haviour of a beast as it is to trust the keener sense and sight of our hunting dogs when we are out after game.

Some omens are no doubt based upon other considerations. The totem of a clan is usually some species of animal. Spirits of dead relatives often take the form of birds, reptiles, or other animals when they come to warn their children of approaching danger.<sup>720</sup> Wasps and hornets are janitors of the burial-caves, and bats and pythons are bedfellows of defunct chiefs who repose in these recesses. Hyenas, ant-pigs, and other burrowing creatures actually dig into the graves. Ants come forth from the underworld to receive the spirit's portion of the sacrifice.<sup>721</sup> Engai sends a wild cat or a hyena to fetch his portion.<sup>722</sup> In Kikuyu, "if a jackal comes into a village and calls at night when the inhabitants are asleep, the people say it is a spirit calling for meat, and it is considered very unlucky, and the owner of the village will next morning take a male goat, lead it round the village, and kill it at about the spot where the jackal called out."<sup>723</sup> Creatures of the underworld and those that prowl round at night when spirits are abroad are in close touch with the dead.

#### TABOO AND PROTECTIVE MAGIC

It appears from Seligmann's book, *The Melanesians of British New Guinea*, that in the south-eastern district of that island the term 'taboo' covers<sup>724</sup> (1) magical taboos, the infringement of which is followed automatically by the physical penalty of illness, and which can be imposed only by those who know the appropriate magical formulae;<sup>725</sup> (2) protective signs carrying the authority of the local community, and having no other penalty attached than that which inevitably follows the outrage of public opinion; and (3) what he calls 'taboos of custom', which consist in abstinence from naming or doing things at special times, and which carry the force of ancient custom. All these

<sup>720</sup> SB. 158-169.

<sup>721</sup> SB. 217.

<sup>722</sup> SB. 356.

<sup>723</sup> Hobley in JRAL. 1911, p. 408.

<sup>724</sup> The classification is mine.

<sup>725</sup> Some of the *geasa* or taboos of the ancient Celts were also of this nature; see RAC. 252-55.

practices are familiar to all Bantu tribes; but the term for 'taboo' is not applied by the Bantu to anything which comes fairly inside the first two categories.

In those parts of New Guinea and the South Seas that I visited, taboo-signs were conspicuous, and some of them were elaborate. Their effect, as far as I could discover, was to bring a tree, garden, path, etc. under the protection of spirit-powers. Now we have the same practice under another name all over Africa; and it is by no means a modern innovation.

In *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (published in A.D. 1613.), it is stated<sup>726</sup> that the people of Loango "use to set in their fields and places where corn or fruits grow, a basket with goat's horns, parrot's feathers, and other trash: this is the Mokisso's ensign, or token that it is commended to his custody; and therefore, the people very much addicted to theft, dare not meddle nor take anything. Likewise if a man wearied with his burthen, lay it down in a highway, and knit a knot of grass and lay thereon; or leave any other note (known to them) to testify that he has left it there in the name of his idol, it is secure from the lime-fingers of any passenger. Conceit would kill the man that should transgress in this kind."

Livingstone noticed a similar device among the honey-gatherers of Angola. After describing their method of placing bark beehives in trees, he writes: "A 'piece of medicine' is tied round the trunk of the tree, and proves sufficient protection against thieves. The natives seldom rob each other, for all believe that certain medicines can inflict disease and death; and though they consider that these are only known to a few, they act on the principle that it is best to let them all alone. The gloom of these forests strengthens the superstitious feelings of the people. In other quarters, where they are not subject to this influence, I have heard the chiefs issue proclamations to the effect, that real witchcraft medicines had been placed at certain gardens from which produce had been stolen; the thieves having risked the power of the ordinary charms previously placed there."<sup>727</sup>

Macdonald quotes<sup>728</sup> Merolla (A. D. 1682) as saying that

<sup>726</sup> SAAB. 79.

<sup>727</sup> MTR. 285.

<sup>728</sup> A. i. 221.

the fields in West Central Africa are planted round with stakes, which being bound with bundles of herbs by the wizards, will kill any thief. And he himself says<sup>729</sup> of the East Africans: "After they have planted their crops, the field is often protected against theft by charms which they buy. Pieces of string, either twisted from native cotton or made of the bark of a tree, are thus used." Rowley noticed the same thing. "The *koño*," he says,<sup>730</sup> "is an invention of the medicine-man to punish those who pilfer from their neighbor's gardens. An ear of corn is here and there smeared with a fatty substance—fat of what, I cannot say;—these ears are artificially connected with a band of bark, which is thus made to pass all round the garden. If any thief stumbles against, or in any way touches this bark band, he is a dead man to a certainty, according to Manganja belief; he may not die directly, but he will waste away of an incurable disease." And again:<sup>731</sup> "The Banyai guard their honey, which is sometimes found in the hollows of trees, and sometimes preserved in hives which are made of bark, among the branches of trees, by tying around the tree wherein the honey is a palm-leaf that has been anointed with some greasy compound, and decorated with some tufts of grass, feathers, &c. They firmly believe that if a thief were to climb over the fetish, or to remove it, he would be afflicted with illness and speedily die. Elsewhere I have seen cornfields similarly protected. Strips of bark joined together and similarly protected with some spiritualised substances are carried around the whole field, and woe be to the man or beast who breaks down the charmed barrier."

Recent writers on Africa also bear testimony to the prevalence of this custom. Hobley says:<sup>732</sup> "If a Kikuyu has had his crops protected by magical processes performed by a medicine-man (to protect in this way is called *ku-roga*), and someone takes food from a garden so protected, he becomes *thahu*<sup>733</sup> and this form of *thahu* can only be removed by the medicine-

<sup>729</sup> A. i. 46.

<sup>730</sup> UMC. 410-11.

<sup>731</sup> RA. 174.

<sup>732</sup> BBM. 110.

<sup>733</sup> Does he? Or is it that he is shunned by his neighbors because they all shrink from associating with one who may, at any moment, be visited with the vengeance of the unseen powers? (See p. 225.)

man who has *roga*-ed the plantation." And similarly when speaking of the Akamba:<sup>784</sup> "Some medicine-men have the power to place a *makwa* upon one of their wives who is a particular favorite. This is done by medicine, but the details are kept secret. If a man seduces the woman in question it is said that death will ensue unless he can by payment induce the medicine-man to lift the curse." Hooper, who has lived for many years in the same part of East Africa, says:<sup>785</sup> "In the old days there was very little pilfering of food from the crops standing in the fields, because each owner was wont to ensure the safety of his crops by placing a charm in the middle of the field, as often as not a human skull perched on the top of a long pole. There were very few men courageous enough to incur the penalties of stealing under such a prohibition."

A recent writer reveals the same belief, clothed in different symbols, in the Old Kongo Kingdom. "Just in the place where a key would be inserted, or through something answering as a staple, the native passes a few leaves called *nkandu*. When in position they take the name of *nkandikwa*, which means prohibition. . . . No heathen dare enter the house, room, or enclosure at the entrance of which this simple fetish has been placed, under penalty of the most awful affliction."<sup>786</sup>

I have contented myself with a few quotations from accessible books dealing with widely separated parts of Africa; but any resident in Bantu tribal territory could exemplify the practice from his own observation; for belief in protective magic dominates all these tribes, and clothes itself in an almost endless variety of symbols. The provision of these magical wares is a regular line of business with magicians, some of whom specialize in this branch of their craft. According to Dr. Seligmann, these usages rank as taboos in Melanesia, though Mr. Giblin calls them 'spells' in a foot-note on p. 576 of Dr. Seligmann's book and remarks that "this casting of a spell has always to be accompanied by a charm or 'prayer' whether audible or not." Mr. Giblin's interpretation accords with Bantu practice. After describing various magical signs that are in use on the Lower

<sup>784</sup> BBM. 131.

<sup>785</sup> *Africa in the Making*. By H. D. Hooper, p. 52.

<sup>786</sup> WBT. 129.

Congo, Weeks rightly remarks: "These various things are not charms in themselves, but are token or warnings (like 'Trespassers will be Prosecuted') put up by the owners of the goods, to inform the thief that a curse is on these things, and what kind of a complaint he will get if he risks the curse. They consider it unfair to put a curse on the stealing of an article and not indicate it in some way."<sup>737</sup> Signs are a frequent concomitant of protective magic throughout Africa, as in other countries; for it is perfectly patent that a curse cannot affect a person who does not know that he is cursed; but Bantu taboos, however it may be in the South Seas, have no signs or symbols, and can neither be laid nor lifted.

In addition to signs that indicate the presence of a curse, there are in Africa other protective symbols that carry the authority of the local community, as there are in Melanesia. In Central Africa there are, or were, stretches of what may be called 'no-man's land', in which many Natives were free to select an unused plot; and the custom was to 'betroth' the selected patch of garden-ground by tying some of the grass into knots, or, if there were trees on the land, by tying bunches of long grass to their trunks.<sup>738</sup> Strikingly similar to Melanesian taboo-signs as these symbols are, they appear to be destitute of magical sanctions, and to rely, like the pegs with which a prospector 'pegs out' his claim, merely upon local usage and the force of public opinion. When there is sickness in a house, the Becwana place a wisp of grass on the wall of its courtyard, close to the entrance, with a stone to keep the grass in position; or they place a stick across the doorway, or stick a twig in the thatch above the door. The hut of a lying-in woman is always thus protected.<sup>739</sup> These are conventional and well-understood quarantine-signs; and if any person were rude enough to disregard them, he would be held responsible for any harm that befell the patient through his intrusion; but there is nothing magical about them, and they are not associated with taboo in the minds of the people.

The smearing of the body with white earth, the shaving of the head, the donning of unwonted ornaments or attire, and the

<sup>737</sup> APB. 239.

<sup>738</sup> NBCA. 179; A. i. 118.

<sup>739</sup> See p. 131f. See also Bs. 191 for similar Basuto practice.

like, may betoken the presence of taboo; but they obviously bear no resemblance to the taboo-signs with which South Sea Islanders are familiar.

It has been said that in some tribes the chief occasionally sends a retainer to place a stick across the entrance to a person's garden or the path that leads to it, and that the effect of this symbol is to lay upon the garden a taboo which no one in his senses, not even the owner of the garden, would dare to break. What is known in Kafir tribes as *Tiger Tail*, belongs to the same category of prohibitions. When a family refuses to hand over to a complainant the cattle amerced by the chief's court, the chief's emissary plants an assegai at the entrance to the kraal, the effect of which is to set a taboo upon that village and its cattle. But this use of the term 'taboo' is merely metaphorical. The stick and the spear are insignia of the chief's authority, like the leopard's tail which the spear has superseded. Outlawry and excommunication are inseparable in the mind of tribesmen to whom the chief is, not only the civil and military head of the community, but also the supreme pontiff in matters of religion—the divine representative of divine ancestors. But save in this sense, there is no more magic in his stick or his spear than in the truncheon of a policeman.<sup>74</sup> They are not taboo-signs; they are symbols of sequestration—the Bantu equivalent of a writ of attachment and a bailiff in possession. To touch a taboo-sign is to invoke the terrors of the unseen world; but a village upon which the injunction of the *Tiger Tail* has been laid is bound to take the spear to the chief at sunrise the following morning, or it will be quickly outlawed and 'eaten up'.

Another misleading remark is to the effect that nothing more than the edict of a chief is needed to transform a common day into a taboo day which is sanctioned by penalties of the same character as those which vindicate other taboos. All the great religious festivals of a Bantu tribe, as distinct from the more private worship of a family, are fenced round with taboos; and most of them are movable feasts. Some, like the New Year Rites and Tithing Festival, are annual events; others, like the

<sup>74</sup> If a Konde person, coming out in the morning, finds at his door a banana stem with leaves tied at the top, he knows that he is suspected of witchcraft, and warned by this symbol to make a hurried departure. SRK. 257.

Puberty Rites and the Major Rain Rites at an old chief's grave, occur at longer intervals, as occasion demands. Although the action of the chief in this matter is confined within superior and inferior limits, it is his prerogative to fix the days of these festivals, and such days become automatically taboo-days, or sabbaths.<sup>740</sup> But it is one thing to fix the date of a religious feast which immemorial usage has protected with a taboo, and quite another to lay a taboo upon a common day.

A somewhat similar mistake is made with regard to Bantu 'doctors'. It is true that Bantu doctors often place a prohibition on the wearer of an amulet which they have made,<sup>742</sup> or the patient who drinks a magical potion which they have brewed; and that such a person has to avoid the forbidden thing just as he would avoid that which is taboo to him. Now taboos are prohibitions, but these prohibitions are no more taboos than those which our physicians lay upon their patients. The 'doctor' forbids this particular thing because he believes it to possess some magical property which would nullify the power of the amulet or potion. Occasionally, also, diviners, who in their primitive and occult manner are specialists in diagnosis, discover that some illness is due to the patient's infringement of some taboo which he thought did not concern him; so they tell the patient to observe this taboo in future.<sup>743</sup> Or, possibly, the patient unaided, save for the gratuitous neighbourly advice which is everywhere lavished upon the sick, runs away with the notion that the reason why certain food disagreed with him must be that it is taboo to him, though he had never heard that that taboo ran in his blood.<sup>743</sup> Or, in diagnosing a case of pregnancy, with astute guesses at the probable paternity of the child or fanciful interpretations of the whims of gestation, diviners sometimes 'discover' that the unborn child will be subject to a certain taboo. There is a distinct difference, however, between discovering a taboo of which the patient was ignorant, and imposing a taboo upon him. My experience is that the Bantu do not place a taboo on anything or anybody, and are no more likely to understand the phrase 'to impose a taboo' than a European would be

<sup>740</sup> See p. 181.

<sup>742</sup> Many such instances are given in IPNR. chap. x.

<sup>743</sup> Cf. IPNR. i. 349.



to fathom the meaning of one who talked of 'imposing a law of nature'. The quality of taboo, so the Bantu feel, is inherent in the object.

#### WORDS USED FOR 'TABOO'

A careful and comparative examination of all Bantu words for 'taboo' would probably throw light on the notion that lurks behind the terms; but the time for that has not yet come. We know next to nothing of the real life of many Bantu tribes; the technical terms in magic, religion, and law have not been adequately scrutinized even in well-known vernaculars; and the study of Bantu etymology is still in its infancy. 'Taboo', 'tapu', 'tabu', or 'tambu', as the word is variously spelt, is not Bantu, but Polynesian,<sup>744</sup> and is said to be made up of *to*, 'to mark', and *pu*, expressing intensity.<sup>745</sup>

In Secwana, the noun 'taboo' is *se-ila* (pl. *ma-ila*) and the verb is *go ila*. The passive of the verb is used of one under taboo. *Bo-tlhodi* is 'ill-luck', and the verb is *go tlhóla*; but *setlhodi* and *seila* are used interchangeably of many things.<sup>746</sup> An abnormal

<sup>744</sup> But see my pp. 191f., 198f.

<sup>745</sup> Dr. Haddon says on p. 30 of his *Races of Man*, &c.: "Taboo is a Polynesian word and is said to mean strongly marked. Things holy and unclean are alike taboo. Tabooed persons render everything they touch taboo; its operation is always mechanical, and the intentions of the taboo-breaker have no effect upon the action of the taboo." And in his 'Definitions' on p. 117: "Taboo (tabu). A Polynesian word implying separated or set apart either as forbidden or as sacred; placed under ban or prohibition; consecrated either to avoidance or to special use or regard." Codrington writes on p. 215 of *The Melanesians*, &c.: "The word taboo is one of the very few that the languages of the Pacific Ocean have given to the English language; and something of its meaning therefore may be supposed to be understood. But the *tapu* or *tambu* of Melanesia is not so conspicuous in native life as the *tapu* of Polynesia; and it differs also perhaps in this, that it never signifies any inherent holiness or awfulness, but always a sacred and unapproachable character which is imposed. This is not strictly accurate as regards the word in the Solomon Islands, where everything connected with a ghost of worship is *tambu* of itself; it is accurate as concerns the Banks' Islands and New Hebrides, where what is inherently sacred is *rongo* or *sapuga*. But still in cases where the English word taboo can be employed there is always in Melanesia human sanction and prohibition. Some thing, action, or place is made *tambu* or *tapu* by one who has the power to do it, any one whose standing among the people gives him confidence to lay this character upon it. The power at the back of the *tambu* or *tapu* is that of the ghost or spirit in whose name, or in reliance upon whom, it is pronounced; for the *tapu* is a prohibition with a curse expressed or implied."

<sup>746</sup> See p. 183f. "*Setlhodi*," said a Mokwena to me, "*ke eo o tlholelan batho mekgwa leha e le melaó*." The idiom is obscure; but as he explained to me, he seemed to mean that *setlhodi* is an intrusion into the customs or laws of a people.

birth, for example, is sometimes called *se-ila* and sometimes *se-ithodi*. *Leshwé* is used of the contamination of taboo-contact, and *go-alafsha* of the removal of this pollution. These words tell their own tale. In modern conversation, *go ila* is the ordinary word for 'to hate', and its noun, *kiló*, is the common term for 'hatred'; but in view of the likelihood that an older sense has been preserved in the ritual use of *ila*, it is reasonable to assume that the word formerly meant 'to shun', and that the modern meaning of 'to hate' is secondary.<sup>747</sup> *Leshwé* is the common word for 'dirt', and its ritual significance is evidently 'defilement'.

*Ila* must be a very old Bantu root: in numerous tribes, thousands of miles apart and separated for so many centuries that they have lost all tradition of a common cradle and become mutually unintelligible in speech, this word is in use, with but little variation in sense or sound. It appears in *zera* (Herero), *zila* (Zulu), *yila* (Thonga), *zhila* (Baila),<sup>748</sup> *yera* (Nyanja), the noun *mu-shilo* (Katanga),<sup>749</sup> *bo-kili* (Lokele)<sup>750</sup> and *bokilo* (Boloki)<sup>751</sup>; and everywhere it may be translated 'taboo'.

Purchas (A. D. 1613), evidently relying upon what he had gathered from Andrew Battel, and apparently referring to Loango, says, in his inimitable manner: "*Kin* is the name of unlawful and prohibited meat, which, according to each kindred's devotion, to some family is some kind of fish; to another a hen; to another a buffe (beef); and so of the rest; in which they observe their vowed abstinence so strictly that if any should (though all unaware) eat of this *kin*, he would die of conceit, always presenting to his accusing conscience the breach of his vow and the anger of Mokisso."<sup>752</sup> In view of the fact that Battel lived before the days of African anthropology and was far from being a trained observer, it is the accuracy of this statement that surprises us, rather than his supposition that the basis of taboo is

<sup>747</sup> Rattray says (AS. 49): "These avoidances or taboos are called in Ashanti, *Akyiwadie* . . . The root is *kyi*, back, behind: hence, to hate; and the whole word literally means 'something you turn your back upon', i.e., a taboo."

<sup>748</sup> Smith & Dale are inclined to derive the tribal name of the Baila from this root.

<sup>749</sup> IHB. 46.

<sup>750</sup> *Yakusu*. By H. Sutton Smith, p. 54.

<sup>751</sup> ACC. 134.

<sup>752</sup> SAAB. 78-79.

a vow to Mokisso.<sup>753</sup> *Kin* is probably from the same root as *ila*; for the Bavili of Loango still use *sh-in* and *th-ina* for the same idea,<sup>754</sup> and the *k-*, *sh-*, and *th-* appear to be prefixes, like the *nk-* in the Kongo word for taboo, *nk-ita*.<sup>755</sup> The Swahili and other tribes on the East Coast enshrine the same idea in their words, *mw-iko* and *m-zio*, from an old verb *eka*, which runs through the majority of Bantu tongues,<sup>756</sup> carrying the sense of 'leave, leave off, cease, abandon,' and often appearing as a negative prefix imparting to other verbs the sense of not to —.<sup>757</sup>

Another word in common use for the same idea on the Gabon and Loango coasts, is *orunda*, from an old root that is widely used by Western Bantu and those who have been much influenced by that stream of culture, appearing as far eastward as the Kafue flats in the Ila word *kutonda* and corresponding noun *mu-tondo*,<sup>758</sup> the technical term for taboo, whatever its literal meaning may be.

An intensive study of other words reported from the Congo is much to be desired: *mpangu*, pre-natal and individualistic food-taboo; *konko*, prohibition which a doctor imposes upon the sick; *nlongo*, general term for food-taboo of the normal sort.<sup>759</sup>

The most remarkable of the Bantu words for 'taboo' is that which is in use among the Akikuyu and their eastern neighbours, the Akamba, in Kenya Colony. It was mentioned first by the Routledges in 1910. "The word *thahu*", they wrote,<sup>760</sup> "is used for ceremonial uncleanness and for illness resulting therefrom. It is not apparently employed in any other sense." Since then Hobley has been digging deep into the customs of these tribes, and has provided us with much useful information. "The widespread prevalence of 'taboo' among these tribes is very surprising," he thinks,<sup>761</sup> "as it is a subject which is rarely mentioned and certainly never openly discussed. It has nevertheless, reached a pitch of considerable elaboration. The reason for many of

<sup>753</sup> See pp. 244ff.

<sup>754</sup> Dennett's *Folk-lore*, &c., 138.

<sup>755</sup> WBT. 130.

<sup>756</sup> Eki is the Fan word for 'taboo'. (RP. 67).

<sup>757</sup> CSBSL. ii. 538.

<sup>758</sup> IPNR. i. 18, 347.

<sup>759</sup> Bentley's *Dicty.* pp. 353, 389.

<sup>760</sup> PP. 256.

<sup>761</sup> BBM. 23.

the prohibitions is obvious, but that of others is extremely obscure." It appears from his book that *thahu* is the Kikuyu word for 'taboo', with *nzahu* as a variant to which old men cling, and that *thabu* is the common term in Ukamba, with *makwa* as a more familiar synonym.<sup>762</sup> The finding of such words as these in a Bantu vernacular is a noteworthy discovery. The initial *th*, we gather from Johnston,<sup>763</sup> is pronounced like the English *th* in 'think', and has probably replaced an earlier *z*, *d*, or may be, *s*. That old men say *nzahu* instead of *thahu*, is an indication that *th* has been substituted for *nz* within, say, a century or so. Johnston notices that there is also a tendency in Kikuyu prefixes and root-words to replace *p* and *f* with *h* or *b*. But even so, it is not easy to connect *thahu* and *thabu* with any current Bantu word-root, though we shall probably hear more on that point when the specialists in Bantu philology and the Kikuyu tongue have turned their attention to this word. The resemblance between *thahu* or *thabu* and the Polynesian 'taboo', 'tabu', or 'tapu' is very striking. Can it be a loan-word that has crept into Kikuyu and Kamba, and if so, from what people was it borrowed?<sup>764</sup> Johnston says<sup>765</sup> that the Akikuyu and Akamba are almost surrounded by a belt of Masai, Gala and Somali tribes; but that their language is thoroughly Bantu, and contains an unusual pro-

<sup>762</sup> For his interpretation of these terms, see my pp. 257ff.

<sup>763</sup> CSBSL. 28ff.

<sup>764</sup> When travelling in the Pacific, I happened upon a paper that was read to the Fijian Society in 1910, on "The Origin of the Fijian Race." The writer discussed the tradition of which one of many versions extant in Fiji relates that Degei (pronounced apparently Ndengei), the deified progenitor of the inhabitants of Navitilevu, and his father, Lutunasobosobo, came originally from the shores of a lake in the interior of Africa. According to this legend, Lutunasobosobo's clan moved from this lake to the east coast of Africa, whence after a while they sailed in three canoes to 'seek some better land'; and after spending five new moons on the ocean and encountering much hardship and danger, one of the canoes—the other two were lost sight of in a hurricane and never seen again—sighted Navitilevu, the largest island of the Fijian group. The writer of the paper dismissed the African origin of the people of Navitilevu as untenable, holding that the "probabilities are very strong against the theory of sailing across the Indian Ocean some 7,000 miles and landing safe in Fiji after five months." To my mind the gravest objection to the trustworthiness of this tradition is the fact that no clan dwelling on the shores of a lake in the interior of Africa some five hundred or a thousand years ago, could possibly have known that it was living in Africa; for that continent never had a Native name and was never thought of as one country, and it is unlikely that any Native on the East Coast at that remote date had ever heard the name of 'Africa'.

<sup>765</sup> *Loc. cit.*

portion of archaic Bantu word-roots, with very few loan-words from Nilotic speech, though there may be a residuum of roots traceable to some pre-existing dwarfish race.

In the light that these words have thrown upon the essential meaning of taboo, we perceive the notion that to do certain deeds, or to make contact with certain things or people, is sure to provoke the virulence of infernal forces, very much in the same way as if one were consigned to the vengeance of the invisible world by means of a curse or a spell; and that such actions are, therefore, to be tabooed, that is to say, shunned.

#### PURIFICATION FROM TABOO-CONTACT

The Becwana, as previously stated, denote the ritual defilement which follows taboo-contact by a word that stands literally for 'dirt'. For the removal of defilement they, accordingly, use the antithetic term, *go tlhapa*, 'to wash the body'.<sup>766</sup> They have a variety of special terms descriptive of particular methods of purification, such as 'to anoint', 'to lustrate', 'to fumigate'; but the only other general term for the processes of renovation is *go alafha*, 'to doctor'.<sup>766</sup> After ceremonial rehabilitation, the patient is described by the verb *go itsheka*, which means in plain speech 'to be clean, clear, or pure'. *Go tlhapa* and *go itsheka* are clearly used in a technical and metaphorical sense. Bantu religious purification, whether from taboo-contact or as a preparation for handling or viewing sacred objects, is neither physical cleansing nor moral wholesomeness, but magical deliverance from the influence of unfriendly spirits. 'Removal of ceremonial defilement' is correct enough, but that abstract phrase is likely to derange the thinking of students who fail to read into it all the terrors of contagion, ostracism, penance, and occult retribution which it conveys to the Bantu mind. For indication of the nature of the 'defilement' we turn, as a matter of course, to the rites by which it is removed; but since these are of endless variety, we must be content to notice a few of the more interpretative among them.

<sup>766</sup> To express this technical sense, causative and passive forms of these verbs are invariably required, because the rite must always be administered to the offender by some person, generally by an elder or his expert agent.

In Bechuanaland, the ritual of expurgation from the taboos of childbirth,<sup>767</sup> consists mainly in censuring both parents with smoke from odoriferous roots, and in fortifying them and the first dish of porridge that they share after the puerperium with occult signs and powders; and the rite culminates in an act of sexual congress which signifies the resumption of marital relations, although among polygamists cohabitation is not resumed till the babe is weaned. For some abnormalities of birth special rites of expurgation are imperative. Among the Bakwena, foot presentations and infants born with teeth were regarded as monstrosities, that ought not to be permitted to live. In a case of face presentation, the belly of a male tortoise and the *manubrium* (first bone of the sternum) of a sheep or goat are chopped up, roasted with 'medicine' in a potsherd, and mixed with a little of the babe's urine. After the parents have been fumigated with this mixture, the residue is ground into powder. Some of this powder is mixed with fat and rubbed into crosslike incisions, cut with a razor between the breast and the navel of each parent;<sup>768</sup> a little of it is strewn also in the form of a cross over a dish of porridge which they will presently eat together; and the remainder is rubbed over their bodies. The incisions must be in the form of a Greek cross or the mathematical sign of addition, and the horizontal bar must be cut before the perpendicular one; the powder must be strewn in the same pattern on the porridge. In the fumigation the parents kneel back to back, the right foot of one crossing the left foot of the other, the potsherd of smoking mixture being placed between their crossed feet and a kaross thrown over them both. A 'doctor' is called in to make the incisions and arrange the fumigation, and he instructs the parents how to strew the powder on the porridge when they are ready to eat. If instead of face presentation it happened to be a child born voiding urine or excrement, or with its afterbirth marked with dark red spots of blood (which they take to indicate disease), the procedure is the same except for the following variations: parings of the toe-nails and finger-nails of both parents

<sup>767</sup> See pp. 129ff.

<sup>768</sup> A somewhat similar sign is painted in white clay on the body of an Ashanti woman at a ceremony observed by husband and wife about the sixth or seventh month of pregnancy. AS. 52.

are substituted for the belly of the tortoise in the charred mixture; and the razor-cuts into which the powder is rubbed are on the large joints and below the navels of both parents. In all these cases, sharing the 'medicated' porridge and sleeping together terminates the puerperium and lifts the taboos of childbirth. It is worthy of note that these rites of expurgation after abnormal childbirth are designed to secure the safety of the father, rather than that of the mother or the babe. Should he resume marital intercourse without this protective ritual he will suffer from chest complaints if his child has arrived with face presentation, or from pains in the joints and loins if its birth has been marked by any of the other abnormalities mentioned.

Dudley Kidd, referring to a feast held by Kafirs three or four weeks after the birth of a child, when the anterior fontanelle shows signs of diminishing in size or when the bones of the skull begin to become firm and the infant is regarded as having taken a firmer hold on life, says:<sup>769</sup> "This feast must be called a feast of purification, for though the ceremony has not the explicit and advanced theological significance which we usually associate with the word 'purification', and which we get from Semitic religion, yet it is held on the day on which the mother shakes off the many taboos that have been resting on her. . . . But the feast is also a mode of communion with the *amatongo* or ancestral spirits, for they are supposed to have given the child to the clan . . . . The killing of the ox seems to have no purifying property 'in the sphere of law', in the sense in which many Christians regard sacrifice as having cleansing efficacy. The feast spreads a sense of friendship and *camaraderie* amongst the members of the clan, and also between them and the *amatongo* of the clan, so that in this sense it is an at-one-ment. The ox is killed to thank the *amatongo* that the mother did not die in childbirth, to show gratitude for the addition to the clan, and to mark the day as that on which most of the taboos are withdrawn. But in a Kafir's mind all this is vague and ill-defined."

The Thonga mother of twins must sexually deceive four men before she can become ritually free from her terrible taboo.<sup>771</sup>

<sup>769</sup> SC. 25.

<sup>771</sup> LSAT. ii. 394-400.

"Certain of the tribes absorbed by the Barozi have a custom that compels a woman, after delivery of a child, to sleep with two other men before returning to her husband. The Barozi themselves do not have this custom."<sup>772</sup> In Kikuyu the mother of twins is handed over to another man till she has borne him a child, after which she returns to her husband; and the mother of a child that has cut its upper incisors before its lower, must cohabit with another man for a month before she returns to her husband.<sup>773</sup> Most features of the ritual of purification from the taboos of childbirth, are obviously magical: the cohabitation of the woman with another man probably originated in an occult attempt to guard her husband from danger by transferring the contamination to strangers—a notion that bulks large in Bantu magic.

Fire often figures in the ritual of expurgation. Some tribes hold that nothing but fire will purge the more personal possessions of the dead.<sup>774</sup> "Fire was used [by the Basuto] to purify a person who had defiled himself by walking over a grave, or even having his foot upon it. A small fire was lighted and the feet of the person were singed in the flame."<sup>775</sup> When a Barozi burial-party returns to the village, a small fire is made on the path outside, and the whole party (men and women) have to leap over the fire as a form of purification. The Alunda of Barotseland do not leap over the fire as the Barotse do, but stand at the nearest bifurcation of the path leading to the village, and the oldest woman of the village brings burning sticks and passes them round the burial party.<sup>776</sup> Tumbuka mourners returning from the grave to the village, are met on the path by a 'doctor', who kindles a great fire and puts certain roots into it, and each of the mourners passes through the flames of the fire.<sup>777</sup> "To the Central African the hearth and its fires are sacred. For instance, if any serious disease breaks out in a village, the headman will call upon the medicine-man to place medicine at the cross-roads, the village fires are raked out, and the smouldering

<sup>772</sup> BRT. 62.

<sup>773</sup> BBM. 154f.

<sup>774</sup> See p. 137.

<sup>775</sup> HB. 261.

<sup>776</sup> BRT. 68 & 70.

<sup>777</sup> WPP. 159.



embers thrown upon the bowl of medicine at the cross-roads. All shout aloud and make as much noise as possible, while the medicine-man departs alone to produce a new flame with his fire-stick, from which all fires are rekindled.<sup>778</sup> Some time after the burial of a Ngoni chief a snake was seen to wriggle into his dismantled house, and, since this was proof enough that his spirit had returned in friendship to his former home, it was decided to terminate the period of mourning. "Now the great witch-doctor is summoned. He orders the village to be swept clean. Heaps of rubbish and broken pots are carried out to the cross-ways. The hearths of the huts are swept, and the smouldering logs are carried out to the rubbish heap. All fire is extinguished. Medicines have been prepared and sprinkled on all the huts, to protect them from magical evil. Then with great ceremony the witch-doctor makes a new fire by friction. A dry log catches, and from this other sticks are kindled, and soon the hearths of all the huts are cheerful with crackling fires. The mourning is over

. . . Barbers are busy shaving the heads and faces of the mourners. The filthy rags are burned, and all go to the river to wash. That night there is a scene of boisterous revelry in the village, for great gourds of beer have been set to which all are welcome.<sup>779</sup> As soon as death occurs in a Wemba village, all fires are extinguished and new fires ceremonially lit. Each mourner in the Mambwe tribe contributes a little firewood to a heap which the medicine-man builds up outside the dead man's hut, and which he ceremonially lights with his fire-stick.<sup>780</sup> In the same district, "when a thunderbolt falls, the chief kindles a new fire from it, and dispenses the embers, ordering his people to quench their old fires and use this fresh flame sent from God."<sup>781</sup> Bakaonde bearers rest the corpse at the cross-roads on the way to the place of interment,<sup>782</sup> and on the return journey they pause again at the same spot, kindle a fire, and lightly touch the feet that have stood at the graveside with a brand from it. "Then a man comes from the village with a little porridge and salt, and a lighted torch of grass taken from the roof of the

<sup>778</sup> GPNR. 285.

<sup>779</sup> AL. 165.

<sup>780</sup> GPNR. 184.

<sup>781</sup> GPNR. 286.

<sup>782</sup> See SB. 44.

deceased's hut. With his torch he runs round the funeral party and throws the torch on the ground. The burial party stamp out the fire, and then the new-comer puts a pinch of porridge and salt in the mouth of each, which they eat; and each then anoints himself on the chest with a little castor oil.<sup>783</sup> After the grave of a Konde chief is filled in, members of the burial-party partake of a 'medicine' prepared from the clippings of the dead man's nails and hair, which is intended, so Mackenzie says, to prevent the disease that killed him from passing over to others.<sup>784</sup>—an unedifying interpretation!

Weeks saw the purification of a Boloki woman from the contamination of having helped to prepare a corpse for burial. "A ring of fire made of small sticks encircled her; she took a leaf, dried it, crunched it in her fist, and sprinkled it on the fire, moving her hands, palms downwards, over the fire ring. When the fire had died out a witch-doctor took hold of the little finger of her left hand with the little finger of his right hand, and, lifting her arm, he drew her out of the fire circle purified."<sup>785</sup> In the purification of a Bakwena hut after the burial of its owner, the dead man's children and other relatives who enter it smear their faces first with crocodile's dung<sup>786</sup> or carry a little of it in their hands, as a protection. They are preceded by an expert who is armed with a splinter from a tree that was struck by lightning,<sup>787</sup> or, failing that, with a wisp of thatch from the eaves over the door, which he lights at the fire in the courtyard; and when the chief mourners have followed him into the hut, he passes the flaming torch in a circle around each of them,<sup>788</sup> and goes out of the hut backwards.

Inasmuch as the crocodile is the totem of this tribe, and therefore the greatest of all its taboos, this protective use of crocodile's dung is the more remarkable; but it is an application of one of the fundamental principles of magic, *similia similibus curantur*. This use of 'a hair of the dog that bit you' shows itself in

<sup>783</sup> WBA. 85, 91.

<sup>784</sup> SRK. 301-302.

<sup>785</sup> ACC. 102.

<sup>786</sup> And yet the crocodile is the totem of this tribe and fenced about with strict taboos; See my p. 173.

<sup>787</sup> Magicians gather up such things and store them till they are needed.

<sup>788</sup> Cf. NBCA. 162 for similar Atonga custom.

many rites of expurgation. The first and last roots taken from the grave while it is being dug are pounded and mixed with water, which is drunk by Mashona grave diggers after they have bathed, as a 'water of purifying.' Mention has already been made of the purifying use of a splinter from a tree that was blasted with a lightning-stroke, that is from a tree so terribly taboo that no medicine-man dare touch it till he has fortified himself with very potent charms. In some cases the urine or the breath of a pregnant woman counteracts the mysterious influence which emanates from her person.<sup>789</sup>

The people of a Kafir kraal in which death has occurred are so unclean that they may not drink milk, nor transact business with other kraals, nor even visit the chief's kraal till the doctor has cleansed them; and the most prominent of the rites by which cows, milk and people are purified, is the offering of a sacrifice by the doctor, and the dosing of the people with a mixture of milk and 'medicine.'<sup>790</sup> If the kraal has been struck by lightning, it needs the services of a special doctor or priest for its cleansing; and his first care is to place a charm upon the neck of every inhabitant of the place. "If a man has been killed by lightning, the doctor chooses an ox, which is slain and offered to the ancestral spirits. Some of the flesh of the ox is charred over the fire, after being mixed with 'medicines'; this mass is then powdered and mixed with milk, and the people have to drink some of the mixture. The doctor then makes incisions in various parts of the bodies of the people, as if he were about to vaccinate them; into these incisions he rubs medicines made from the charred remains of the ox. After this the people have to shave their heads. Then they are considered clean."<sup>791</sup>

When any of the Tumbuka people are killed by lightning, "a 'doctor' is called, and after sacrifice, he washes all the villagers with 'medicine', and all the fires are taken from the houses, and thrown down at the cross-roads. Then the 'doctor' kindles a new fire by friction and lights again the village hearths."<sup>792</sup>

If lightning strikes a hut, person, or beast in Wawanga territory (Elgon district), a medicine-man kills a black sheep, and

<sup>789</sup> See p. 128f.

<sup>790</sup> EK. 249.

<sup>791</sup> EK. 125.

<sup>792</sup> WPP. 132.

removes all skin and flesh from its skull. Then 'medicine' is roasted in a pot, and everybody in the village is given a little to lick up in the palm of his hand; some of it is put into reeds and hidden in the thatch of every hut in the village; and the medicine-man pours the remainder into the sheep's skull, and buries it where the lightning struck, together with a stick from the hut which was struck, or some grass from the spot where the lightning killed the person or the beast.<sup>793</sup>

Such rites of purification suggest religion rather than magic; but in their rudimentary form, science, religion, and magic all shade off into one another. Magicians frequently use what they call 'medicines', that is roots, bulbs, and herbs; but the Bantu regard all medicines, even European drugs, as occult substances. Bantu magicians are experts in ancestor-worship; and the mathematical sign of addition which comes to the fore in purification from the taboo of childbirth, and which is a frequent and potent sign in Bantu magic,<sup>794</sup> was, like the sign of multiplication, a mystic symbol in some pre-Christian religions of Italy and other Mediterranean lands. Sacrifice figures in the ceremonies of purification from all the major taboos; but sacrifices are accompanied by acts, signs, and phrases that are unintelligible apart from magic. Was it magic or religion when the experts ripped gall-bladders from the sides of live calves, and sprinkled the gall over Chaka to purify him after the death of his mother?<sup>795</sup>

During her period of mourning, a Becwana widow has her head shaved; discards her ornaments and one sandal; wears her fur cloak inside out, so that the fur shows;<sup>796</sup> and eats with her left hand. Chewed pumpkin-seed is also placed in her ears by one who has previously been purged from the taboo of widowhood. All this appears to give her temporary protection from the taboo that rests upon her, but not to effect its removal. If she visits her paternal home after her bereavement and before

<sup>793</sup> JRAL., 1913., p. 49.

<sup>794</sup> In many parts of England, charmers still charm away diseases by crossing the affected part and muttering a formula; charm away warts by crossing them with a stick of elder; and cure cramp by directing the afflicted person to place his shoes and stockings in the form of a cross as he goes to bed.

<sup>795</sup> KNZC. 247.

<sup>796</sup> Can this curious custom be related to an old Cornish belief that a person who is pixy-led can escape the fascination by turning a garment wrong side out, or even turning a pocket inside out?

she is purged of her taboo, which some tribes expect her to do, an ox is sacrificed, and its chyme placed at the entrance to the home and covered with leaves of the *mosetlha* bush; and, holding in her hand some of the sacrificial flesh, she treads upon this chyme as she passes into her old home.<sup>797</sup> Then her head is shaved and her body anointed with oolitic hematite and fat; and that night the skin of the sacrificed beast is spread near the place where she sleeps. The first part of this ceremony is performed for a widower, also, if he visits the paternal home of his deceased wife during the period of his taboo, as he is likely to do. This makes it safe for the widow or widower to sleep there, but does not remove the taboo. About a month after the funeral, when sacrifice is offered for the release of the spirit of the deceased, an ox is sacrificed (unless the family cannot afford anything better than a goat); and the widow is given marrow from its shin-bones to eat, and is struck over the loins with its large bowel, which has been extracted, medicated, tied at each end, and inflated for the purpose.<sup>798</sup> These rites appear to remove all the dangers of the taboo, except that the surviving spouse must avoid sexual intercourse till the following July. In that month a temporary booth was erected outside the town and all who had lost a spouse since the preceding July were required by custom to spend one night there in miscellaneous cohabitation, having no choice of partner, after which each one had to wash his or her whole body with a decoction of bulbs that causes severe itching, to inflict a wound on the private parts and catch the dripping blood in a vessel containing the dregs of the decoction, and to sprinkle it on the ground outside. This ceremony removed the last vestiges of the contamination.

<sup>797</sup> See p. 254 for the use of chyme in purifying Kikuyu undertakers. Hopley mentions a somewhat similar use among the Akamba: "There is a curious custom among the Kamba of Ulu in the event of a member of the family being away when a death occurs in a village. An elder measures the corpse, cuts a stick of the same length and places it alongside of the house of the deceased; this procedure is believed to protect the absent one from evil. Upon his return a goat is killed and he is smeared with the contents of the stomach, *muyo* in Ki-Kamba, the *tatha* of Kikuyu, and some is deposited at the door of the hut, and he must tread in it before he enters the hut; this ceremonially purifies him. The stick is then taken up by . . . one of the elders who understands the ritual connected with the removal of *thabu* or *makwa*, and it is thrown out into the bush where the corpse of the deceased was deposited." (JRAI. 1911, p. 422.)

<sup>798</sup> See p. 175 for similar use of this intestine.

Many tribes consider coition indispensable to the purgation of a widow or widower from this taboo. Junod particularizes what the Thonga think essential to its performance.<sup>799</sup> Smith records the Ila practice.<sup>800</sup> In the Kasempa district, a little farther north, *via u tuzhi* is the fee paid by a widow (or her relatives) to her husband's heir for thus releasing her from the taboo of widowhood, or by a widower to his deceased wife's family for sending her 'sister' to render him an analogous service; and Melland's important note on the exorbitant fee that is often demanded<sup>801</sup> shows that ceremonial coition is not an act of concupiscence. Some tribes are content if the act is but nominal, and some have substituted a conventional symbol. On the Lower Congo, for example, the widow "sits on the ground and stretches her legs before her, and her deceased husband's brother steps over them."<sup>802</sup> She is now purified, and will be free to marry when the time of her widowhood [from one to two years] is completed." The final rite of purification for a widower is similar: his deceased wife's sister steps over his outstretched legs.<sup>803</sup>

In Kikuyu, removal of the contamination of ordinary taboo-contact "is effected by the process of lustration, which, in the more serious cases, has to be done by the medicine man, and in others by the members of the native council. . . . The lustration ceremony is almost always accompanied by the slaughter of a sheep and anointment with the contents of the stomach, the white diatomaceous earth called *ira* being used in some cases. The purification is called *tahika*."<sup>804</sup> But the process of removing the pollution of death depends upon the circumcision guild of which deceased was a member. If he belonged to the Masai guild, the estate is divided a month after burial. "The children or heirs then take four rams, and the women of the village take off their ornaments and all sleep together in the same hut, and the four sheep are also placed in the hut in question. In the morning the elders arrive and the sheep are killed, the fat is

<sup>799</sup> LSAT. i. 201.

<sup>800</sup> IPNR. ii. 60ff.

<sup>801</sup> WBA. 103-108.

<sup>802</sup> See my p. 130.

<sup>803</sup> APB. 273f.

<sup>804</sup> BBM. 104f.; cf. AK. 78f. for the use of chyme in removing pollution from taboo-breakers.

cooked and then put away to cool; while the meat is eaten by the assembled people. . . . On the following day the heads of all the inhabitants of the village are shaved and they are anointed with the fat of the sheep. During the ceremony the people present wear their skin garments inside out, and these are anointed with the cooked latex of the *mugumo* fig tree; after their bodies have been anointed with the fat they can turn their skin robes right side outward once more, and the women resume their ornaments."<sup>805</sup> If deceased was circumcised after the Kikuyu pattern, the elders sacrifice a ram on the third day after the interment to cleanse the village from the stain of death. "The same day the elders bring with them one of their number who is very poor, and of the same clan as deceased, and he has to sleep in the hut of the senior widow of the deceased and have connection with her; he generally lives on in the village and is looked upon as a stepfather to the children."<sup>806</sup> Among the Thaka or Tharaka people in the Tana valley, south-east of Kenya, "after the death of the head of a family the sons may take the younger widows to wife, but not until the brother of deceased has ceremonially cohabited with the principal wife of deceased. If this rite is not observed before the son marries one of the father's widows, he will become *makwa*."<sup>807</sup> The Kipsikis (or Lumbwa) live at no great distance from the Akikuyu. When one of their tribesmen reaches home after slaying a foe in a raid, his fellow-villagers throw grass upon him; then he bathes ceremonially in a stream, plasters red earth on the right of his face and white earth on the left, treats his shield and spear with the same mixture, sacrifices a goat, goes into seclusion for a month, and then "seeks a strange woman, especially one who is thought barren, and has connection with her."<sup>808</sup> Sacrifice is often, if not always, included in the ritual for the expurgation of slayers.<sup>809</sup>

In Bechuanaland, offensive wars were almost exclusively cattle-raiding expeditions. No impartial student of Becwana tribes would charge them with truculence, and few people were slain in

<sup>805</sup> Hobley in JRAL., 1911, p. 419.

<sup>806</sup> BBM. 98.

<sup>807</sup> BBM. 132. See also BBM. 130 for the idea of throwing away the contamination of taboo-contact.

<sup>808</sup> JRAL., 1923, p. 47.

<sup>809</sup> See my pp. 174, 176f.

their inter-tribal fights; though they claim that even he who had killed a lion was not ranked as a man till he had slain a foe, and that the prospect of a fight was more attractive than booty to the young bloods. Upon reaching home after a foray, the war-party went straightway to the Place of Tribal Assembly and sang the war-songs (*go ya kóma*); whereupon the chief presented them with slaughter-stock from the captured herds that they had brought in, and the banquet began. This feast was held in the Place of Tribal Assembly, and all the world and his wife were there; but the army kept aloof from the crowd. It was a sacrificial meal, which does not mean that it was arid, pensive, or sedate; and the army was lustrated with 'holy water' of Becwana brew. Every warrior who had slain a foe was purified in a more elaborate manner. After being taken to a stream and bathed in medicated water, the body of each slayer was 'washed' in chyme from the intestines of the sacrificed beast,<sup>810</sup> both rites being often shared by the rest of the war-party. In the Place of Tribal Assembly, a chunk of roasted meat was cut into lumps as big as walnuts, placed in a wooden trencher, and sprinkled with a black powder, of which the Great Tribal Talisman was the chief ingredient. Around this trencher the slayers were assembled; and as each postulant knelt, holding his hands behind his back, and took one piece of medicated meat with his teeth, he received one stroke from a switch which the presiding 'doctor' wielded. Then came the striking of the slayers with the inflated colon, to which I have already alluded.<sup>812</sup> The Secwana name for the whole ceremony is *go alafsha dintéi*, and the application of the rod is said *go mo ketehatsa pelo*, that is 'to harden his heart' so that he will not be afraid. In some Becwana tribes, the bits of medicated meat were thrown to each slayer by the presiding 'doctor', and the slayer was required to catch his morsel in his mouth.

<sup>810</sup> Chyme from the stomach and intestines of cattle, and even cow-dung from the cattle-pen, is thought to be very cleansing. Boys at cattle-posts delight to smear themselves with a mixture of cow-dung and milk; and it was common in the old days for a man sitting in the Place of Assembly to send a boy into the adjoining cattle-pen to fetch him a little cow-dung with which to wash his hands, and sometimes his face. Youths who had recently passed through the Puberty rites were fond of doing this; and they never forgot their faces. It was such a manly thing to do!

<sup>812</sup> See p. 175.



Notwithstanding differences in detail, the Basuto ritual is closely related to that of the Becwana, and the sacrificial element is prominent. "A sacrifice had to be made on the return of a warlike expedition in order to purify those whose hands were soiled with the blood of those they had killed. This had to be done before they reached home, otherwise there would be a curse on such houses as their shadows had rested upon, or on any person who came in contact with them. They also had to cleanse themselves by ablution."<sup>813</sup> Arbousset records<sup>814</sup> Makoniane's description of the rites by which he and two other Basuto warriors were purified after a marauding venture in which they had slain a foe. The 'priest of war', as he calls him, fried<sup>815</sup> the tip of the tongue of a black ox, sacrificed for the occasion, one of its eyes, and pieces of its hamstring and the principal tendon of its shoulder, with herbs of mysterious virtue which he had brought in his 'priest's horn; dipped a piece of its pleura (diaphragm?) into the fried mixture and put it in the common pot in which they were cooking for Makoniane and the rest of the men; washed and rewashed their bodies (not their heads) with its gall, diluted with water from a running stream; and introduced a little of the fry into the joints of the slayers' limbs. This was apparently all that Makoniane's comrades needed; but as he was the actual slayer of the foe, the 'priest' slit the gall-bladder of the ox and slipped it over his wrist (the hand that did the deed?); inserted some of the 'sacred fry' into the large gut of the sacrificial victim and bound it round his neck; and carefully pounded up the remainder of the 'fry' and gave it him to use as occasion might demand. This seems to have completed the cleansing; for Makoniane's mother came then and shaved their heads, and he dipped his finger into a mixture of chalk and water and applied it to one of his temples, while his friends cried out in congratulation: 'See, he is purified! See, his time of mourning is over!' The three raiders were forbidden to return to their youthful companions till the morning, it is true; but the men of the place and some old matrons ate and drank with them in the

<sup>813</sup> HB. 259.

<sup>814</sup> NET. 396-99.

<sup>815</sup> 'Fried' is probably a mistranslation for 'charred'; a pounded 'fry' would hardly yield 'the powder of purification.'

court of the men, Makoniane having added some of his 'powder' of purification' to the beer which his mother provided. Makoniane explained some of this ritual for Arbousset's benefit, but it must be remembered that he was not in a position to know what the priest really brought in his horn and added to the 'fry', and his interpretation must be taken as popular rather than esoteric. According to him, the tip of the tongue was to persuade the family gods to prevent the enemy from injuring them; the sinews were used so that the feet and hands of the enemy might fail them in battle; the eye, so that the eye of the enemy might not dare to cast a covetous glance upon their cattle; the gall, because it represents the anguish of death, which cleaves to the murderer so that even the water of purification will not wash it away; the pleura, because it is the symbol of conscience; the large gut was worn night and day by the slayer to disperse frightful dreams and melancholy thoughts, which might otherwise drive him crazy or kill him with remorse; and the hair was shaved off that a new crop might grow, and all that was old and defiled, having disappeared, might be forgotten.

Among the Balumbu, "the warriors had to be cleansed. The doctor went round to the slayers and put a little 'medicine' on each man's tongue, 'that the person slain might not trouble him.' Another cleansing process is called *kupupulula*. The warrior was bathed in the fumes of certain medicines burnt in a sherd: the ashes were afterwards placed in a koodoo horn and planted at the threshold of his hut to drive off the ghost of the person he had killed."<sup>816</sup> Among the many interesting features of the purification of slayers by the medicine-man at the Thonga capital, Junod mentions<sup>817</sup> the insertion of occult powders into incisions specially made on their foreheads, the thurification of each slayer with smoke from a pot of 'medicines' mixed with the chyme of a sacrificed goat, the application of a mixture of milk and various occult substances to the lips of each slayer, the chanting of a sacerdotal spell which consigns the spirits of the slain to the nether world, and then finally the rubbing of each slayer's body with the same occult mixture that was applied to his lips. He mentions, also, that some of the charred fragments

<sup>816</sup> IPNR. i. 179.

<sup>817</sup> LSAT. i. 453-56.

which remain in the incense-pot are pulverised and parcelled out in little bags, which the slayers wear round their necks, for protective purposes; and he says that this powder is credited with the potency of the Great Tribal Talisman itself. The things used by the slayers during their isolation are defiled beyond retrieval, and are consequently hung upon a tree outside the village, and left to rot. In the purgation of Pedi warriors,<sup>818</sup> certain portions of the bodies of the slain and of the flesh of a sacrificed ox, cooked together with 'medicines' and stirred with war-spears, were poured into a basket, which it was taboo to touch; and the warriors, daubed with white earth, approached this basket on their knees and, uttering cries like vultures, caught morsels of this horrible stew in their teeth, being careful not to touch them with their hands.

After Switi, chief of the Dwandwe, killed Dingiswayo (A. D. 1819?), he was purified with 'medicine' of which one of the ingredients was a portion of deceased's head-ring; and day after day for several days while the corpse lay unburied, the slayer had to dip his assegai (probably the one that did the deed) into another boiling decoction and spit upon it as he held it towards the sun.<sup>819</sup>

It is stated upon the authority of Dr. Crawford of the Kenya Medical Mission,<sup>820</sup> that among the rites of purification from taboo-contact that are practised in his district, the patient has to spit seven times after the foot of the sacrifice has been dipped in its offal—I suppose he means chyme?—and pushed into his mouth.

Notwithstanding the fact that the shaving of the head is a fairly constant concomitant of the ritual of purification, it is apparently not credited with power to remove the contamination. The Becwana exclude recently shaven mourners from their houses, while admitting them to their courtyards, for, they say, *o ila re okama le bana ba rona*, that is, 'he will overlook' (or 'overhang', to be pedantically correct) 'us and our children.' Such 'overlooking' is quite independent of the volition of the

<sup>818</sup> LSAT. i. 456, footnote.

<sup>819</sup> KNZC. 253.

<sup>820</sup> PP. 258. If 'seven' is a taboo number among Dr. Crawford's people, as it is among the Becwana, this may be another application of the homeopathic principle that is so prominent in magic.

mourner, but is believed to produce conjunctivitis or else running sores on the body. Against this notion we have to set the fact that among some tribes, and among Becwana in the case of other taboos than that of mourners, the shaven head is a sign of release from taboo-contact. Baila men neither shave nor wash during the period of mourning, which extends from the time of death till the final funeral feast, perhaps a year later, and the women neither wash nor cut their hair nor shave their heads;<sup>821</sup> but shaving the head, in the case of widows at any rate, appears to be one of the last rites of purification.<sup>822</sup> The Banyoro custom is much the same. "During the time of mourning, they may not shave nor wash, cut their hair or pare their nails. . . . Before they come into contact with the outside world again all appearances of mourning must be removed. The hair on all parts of the body, even to the eyebrows, is shaved off, their nails are pared, and, having washed, each mourner is given by the heir a new garment to wear. . . . The final act of purification is to visit the king and greet him, presenting him with the compulsory offering of a cow, after which they may return to their normal existence."<sup>823</sup> This discordance of practice is, however, more apparent than real. Some tribes have but one period of mourning, while others have two,<sup>824</sup> and a few, three; or, to be more precise, some tribes observe two periods of defilement for mourners, of which the first involves a wide circle of relatives for a short time and the second affects a smaller group till the canonization of the dead, while widows and widowers are sexually unclean for a still longer period though freed from other defilement.<sup>825</sup> Shaving marks the last act of release from each period of defilement.<sup>826</sup> In tribes that recognize only the first period, the shaven pate is therefore a sign of deliverance from the taboo; but in those that observe both first and second, the shaving of the first period still leaves the mourner unclean.

A person who has been shaven in the final acts of purification from taboo-contact is immediately coated with oolitic hematite

<sup>821</sup> IPNR. i. 63.

<sup>822</sup> IPNR. ii. 62.

<sup>823</sup> SCA. 195.

<sup>824</sup> Cf. p. 136.

<sup>825</sup> See my pp. 208ff.

<sup>826</sup> Cf. LSAT. i. 146, 152.

and fat, red clay, camwood paste, or whatever happens to be the tribal fashion of 'dressing' for social functions. Does that mean that shaving and 'dressing' are not so much rites of expurgation as tokens of return to society or signs that the laws of cleansing have been complied with? Basoga practice seems to indicate that this would be a lame conclusion. These people terminated their period of mourning with a libation of beer and a sacrificial meal at the grave; "they then washed and shaved all the hair from their bodies, and the hair was taken and deposited in some neighbouring country. This had to be done secretly, for the hair was thought to bring death, and if discovered would almost certainly lead to war."<sup>1827</sup>

What is the significance of white earth in the ritual of expurgation? In Europe polite society used to demand that men should don one set of garments for daily duties and another for hunting, or yachting, or fishing, or cricketing, or dancing; and that the costume of a bride, a mourner, or a penitent should betoken the dominant emotion; for adornment is the twin-sister of symbolism. The Bantu ascribe similar importance to fitting attire. Before the yeast of European civilization had changed the texture of their thought and equated nudity with indecency, they draped their scanty apparel with a view to adornment and set a high value upon body-painting, cicatrization, and, in a few tribes, tattooing. Durable decorations served to symbolize the permanent affiliation of the individual to the social group, and raiment and pigment were changed to match passing pursuits or emotions.<sup>828</sup> Fashion varied from tribe to tribe: people of one

<sup>827</sup> GS, 129f.

<sup>828</sup> Something should be said about the Bantu use of colour-terms as symbols of emotions. *Pelotshétlha* ('yellow heart') is the usual Secwana expression for 'envy'; *pelochweu* ('white heart') stands for 'kindness or considerateness or amiability'; and *peloncho* ('black heart') means 'bad temper', while *go bifha* ('to look black') is 'to be displeased'. *Pula e chwen* ('white rain') is 'soft, gentle, warm rain'. *Phépa* means 'clear, pure, transparent'; and one of my African mentors maintained that *bophépa boa pelo* denotes 'a beautiful heart that has no stain on it', and is therefore a stronger expression than *pelochweu*. *Hubidu* is ('red'; and *matlhó mahubidu* ('red-eyed') describes a person who is 'always scolding and complaining', while *Ke utlule bothoko, pelo ea me e bile e ntse khubidu* ('I was hurt, and my heart is still red') means 'I am still angry because of the wrong that was done me'. *Motho eo o tala* ('a person who is green') is 'a fierce, quick-tempered person'. Bantu colour-terms for animals include pattern as well as colour, but some of them are used in a similar manner. I doubt whether there is an English equivalent for *marabaraba*. 'Dappled' is too tidy, and 'daubed' does not suggest rounded spots of confused colour. But *motho eo o marabaraba* is 'a

tribe turned up the whites of their eyes at a mourner who neglected to mantle his body with fresh soot and palm oil;<sup>829</sup> the bereaved of another tribe were deemed wicked if they failed to coat themselves with whitewash; while a tribe here and there prescribed red as the only decorous colour for deep mourning.<sup>830</sup> The Chief of Vanity Fair rides his African asses with a tight rein and a short curb. Magical considerations also count in the choice of finery. Everything is credited with a soul that makes it what it is and enables it to do what it does, and the soul of a thing imparts its characteristic quality to anyone who wears or eats a fragment of its body. A man can catch the ferocity of a leopard by eating its heart, the wariness of a 'Go-away' bird by sticking one of its feathers into his hair, or the courage of a lion by wearing a strip of its skin. Camouflage counts, too. Bantu warriors feel safer in action with naked and well-greased bodies than with clothes that fetter movement and give antagonists something to grip; but they have noticed that the protective colouring of wild things dazzles the aim of a hunter and enables them to lurk unperceived in slender cover.<sup>831</sup> The white pigment that

person of uncertain temper, whose action cannot be anticipated'. But we must not wander too far ahead. Dr Tilsley of the Luanza Mission, writing in the January 1929 issue of *World Dominion* (London), states "that the idiom commonly found in Bantu languages for what is agreeable is expressed in terms of whiteness, while that for what is sad or disagreeable is in terms of blackness. In chi-Luba, *ku toka* 'is to be white', and in the passive form, *ku tokwa* is 'to be joyous or pleased', whereas 'to be black' is *ku fita*, and the passive form *ku fitwa* signifies 'to be sad or displeased'. And to this agrees the custom that when a cause has been heard and the doom has been promulgated by the elder appealed to, justification of the accused is signified by making upon him a smear of white—usually either of chalk or wood ash, whereas, conversely, condemnation is indicated by smears of black—usually charcoal.' Cf the last sentence with my p 219.

<sup>829</sup> Monteiro states (ARC 1 277) that in Angola mourning "is simple and inexpensive; a few ground-nuts are roasted in a crock till they are nearly burnt, and being very oily are then readily ground into a perfectly black paste. This, according to the relationship with the deceased, is often rubbed over the whole, or only part of the face and head; in some cases this painting is a complicated affair, being in various devices all over the shaven head and face, and takes some time and pains to effect, and to prevent its being rubbed off at night by the cloth with which they cover themselves, they place a basket kind of mask on their faces." The Konde smear the corpse of an unmarried man with charcoal so that he may not be mistaken for a married man in the underworld (SRK. 193.) Cf the *butwa* and *chisunfu* markings on p 219.

<sup>830</sup> GGC chap XXIII contains valuable information about Bantu dress and adornment.

<sup>831</sup> To Bushmen, camouflage is second nature. When women of that race "speckle the face and breast with red and yellow paint and white clay", they do not intend "to frighten strangers" as Arbousset wrongly concluded (NET 354.)

they like to wear is therefore laid on in curved stripes, dots, and circles,<sup>832</sup> some tribes working in one or two lines or dots of indigo or red on the background of brown skin. Nevertheless, since Bantu associate good luck with whiteness and bad luck with blackness, it is probably safe to assume that their choice of colour and pattern is connected with the protective magic to which warriors always look for the gift of invisibility in battle; for hunters do not adopt the disguises of warriors and yet love to smear a patch of white earth on their foreheads.<sup>833</sup>

However it may be with the markings of warriors and hunters, the covering of the body with a flat coat of whitewash is certainly due to a magical conception of life. In Bunyoro, the milkmen and milkmaids<sup>834</sup> who provide the king with milk from his sacred cows "were purified for the performance of their duties, and had to observe certain restrictions during the time they were in office. The men took leave of all relations and friends for their term of duty, which lasted four days, for during that time they were not allowed to hold communication with anyone but the chief of the kraal; especially must they keep themselves apart from women, even looking away if a woman approached, and refusing to answer if one addressed them . . . Both men and maids had their faces, chests and arms covered with white clay while they performed their duties."<sup>835</sup> "When the milk had been carried into the dairy, the dairymaid set it ready for use and prepared the stool on which the king sat. She also was purified and had her hands, face and chest covered with white clay."<sup>836</sup> And after the death of the king, a mixture of water and white clay is sprinkled over his successor, the people, the cattle, and the earth, as part of the purification rites.<sup>837</sup> *Mpemba* (white clay, chalk, or lime) is applied to the chest and forehead of a Kaonde chief in one of the ceremonies

<sup>832</sup> Cf. GGC. 561 (footnote).

<sup>833</sup> IPNR. i. 252.

<sup>834</sup> Although these milkmaids do not milk the cows, they are allowed to assist the milkmen in the cattle-pen during the milking. This departure from Bantu custom may be due to Bahima influence in Bunyoro, but the Bunyoro use of white earth is quite in accord with Bantu usage.

<sup>835</sup> SCA. 145.

<sup>836</sup> SCA. 147.

<sup>837</sup> SCA. 202.

by which he is installed in the chieftainship.<sup>838</sup> When diviners of the Bakgalagadi and many other tribes have applied their tests to those who are suspected of witchcraft, they smear the guilty with a paste of ground charcoal, and the innocent with a paste of white earth. Campbell calls it<sup>839</sup> 'life's justification mark' when babes, in the Mweru-Bangweulu district, are marked with white chalk to show that they have cut their lower incisors before their upper and are therefore given the right to live. "Wemba women still whiten their faces with chalk when the moon appears . . . . In the *butwa* ceremony the bodies of the neophytes are whitened all over with lime or chalk, and in the *chisungu*<sup>840</sup> ceremony the bride has white rings painted round the eyes, while the bridegroom has a white ring smeared round one arm. Painting the body, it will thus be seen, is mainly reserved for solemn rites and important functions."<sup>841</sup> Dr. Lacerda states in his diary, under date Oct. 2, 1798, that the messengers sent to welcome him on his approach to the capital "said that the Cazembe was so much satisfied with my coming that he soon would plaster his body with chalk, in sign of thankfulness to his 'spirits' ".<sup>842</sup> Among the Baluba of Congoland, grave-diggers purify themselves at sunrise on the morning after the funeral by washing and rubbing themselves with white ochre all over the body.<sup>843</sup> The Ngoni army returning from battle, rest for a day on the banks of a river within a mile or so of the royal village, when every warrior who has slain a human being smears his body and arms with white clay, while those who have merely assisted in slaying whiten only their right arms. After the army has been formally received in the royal kraal, the slayers sleep for a night in the open kraal with the cattle, and next morning run again to the stream, shouting the alarm cries of their enemies, and wash off the white clay. "The witch-doctor is there to give them some magic medicine to drink, and to smear their bodies with a fresh coating of

<sup>838</sup> WBA. 99, 100.

<sup>839</sup> IHB. 169.

<sup>840</sup> The *butwa* ceremony appears to be that of a secret society for both sexes which has superseded the Boys' Puberty Rites; and the *chisungu* ceremony is the Girls' Puberty Rites, which are connected in this district with certain hymeneal observances.

<sup>841</sup> GPNR. 255.

<sup>842</sup> LC. 102.

<sup>843</sup> GGC. 646.



clay. For six days the process is repeated, until their purification is completed. Their trappings and war dress are hung on a tree, the head is shaved, and, being pronounced clean, they are at length allowed to return to their own homes.<sup>844</sup>

The cooking-pots used at Bakwena wedding feasts and some other great occasions are protected against unfriendly magic by being marked inside and out with a profusion of white spots. To make these spots, the doctor dips the tips of his finger and thumb into a paste of crocodile's dung and water, and applies them to the pot. In the Puberty Rites of the Becwana, Basuto, and Kafirs, and many other Bantu tribes, the neophytes, both boys and girls, are coated with white earth during their seclusion.<sup>845</sup> White diatomaceous earth is used in the purification rites of the Akikuyu.<sup>846</sup> It is probably correct to say that white earth, pipe-clay, ashes, or flour is used by Bantu everywhere to mark the presence of the more serious taboos; but the Bakwena believe that a little crocodile's dung which is also white, adds greatly to the virtue of this mixture. They assert that *phépa*, which is their technical term for this white mixture, refers primarily to crocodile's dung, and that the other meanings of the word, 'clear, pure, light-coloured', are derivative. Though Native etymology must always be taken with a pinch of salt, it often throws light on the current conceptions of the people; and it must not be forgotten that the crocodile is an old and widespread Bantu totem. Le Roy tells us that in Gabon the chalk or tapioca (cassava?) mixture applied to the persons of mourners is often fortified with the powdered bones of a dead person; and that the stronger, the richer, the more intelligent and powerful the person was, the more eagerly is his powder sought after.<sup>847</sup>

If a woman of the Ekoi (a semi-Bantu-speaking people who live on the border of Cameroons and Southern Nigeria) wishes to separate from her husband without his consent, she extinguishes the fire on the hearth, cuts her hair, and covers herself with white paint.<sup>848</sup>

<sup>844</sup> WPP. 39f.

<sup>845</sup> Cf. IHB. 103, Bs. 268, GGC. 192, 669.

<sup>846</sup> BBM. 105.

<sup>847</sup> RP. 199.

<sup>848</sup> *In the Shadow of the Bush*. By P. A. Talbot. p. 113.

White clay is a sign of joy in Ashanti, according to Rattray, and red clay a sign of mourning.<sup>849</sup> Of the wives of a dead king, those who were counted worthy to enter the spirit-world in the ghostly retinue of their husband, "decked themselves in white, as for a ceremonial feast, and put on all their gold ornaments"; and boys despatched to become his elephant-tail switchers and heralds "were smeared with white clay as a sign of joy."<sup>850</sup> But when one reads that in the Ashanti ritual of divorce a husband "takes some white powdered clay and sprinkles the woman's shoulders",<sup>851</sup> it is surely permissible to wonder whether, after all, the primary meaning of white clay may not be magico-religious separation, rather than joy.

It is hard to determine the precise function of white earth in removing the defilement of taboo-contact;<sup>852</sup> but upon the whole the evidence seems to suggest that it marks the separation of the individual from the community, rather than his purification, though the separation may be legitimately regarded as the first act in the ritual of expurgation. Le Roy's explanation that white is the colour of the manes, really explains nothing;<sup>853</sup> for he himself states on the same page<sup>854</sup> that though a paint of white chalk or tapioca flour is used in funeral ceremonies, puberty dances, 'and in all circumstances where the spirits of the dead are directly concerned', as he phrases it, yet a paint of red wood mixed in palm oil is used throughout West Africa in connection with sacrifices, and for the painting of a new-born child, its mother, sick people who are about to be treated, and the skulls of the dead which are cut off and kept for domestic worship—all rites in

<sup>849</sup> RAA. 195.

<sup>850</sup> RAA. 108-109.

<sup>851</sup> RAA. 101.

<sup>852</sup> We learn from the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus that Greek mystae used to bedaub themselves with a sort of white clay or gypsum. Gypsum was so characteristic of the mysteries that he constantly qualifies it with the adjective 'mystic'; but it had evidently lost its original meaning and continued as a convention before he wrote. See *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* by Jane Ellen Harrison, p. 492. Orphic worshippers daubed themselves with gypsum when about to tear the sacred animal, and the legend that the Titans thus hid their identity when they mutilated Zagreus was perhaps an attempt to account for a cherished custom that was no longer understood.

<sup>853</sup> Though the statement is true enough. In an amusing Makalaka ghost-dance that I have often seen, the man who played the part of the dead was always shrouded with a white cloth.

<sup>854</sup> RP. 199.

which the spirits of the dead are directly concerned. The truth is that we need much more interpretative information before we can accurately determine the true significance of white, black, and red in African ritual.

As far as we can make out, there is little if any difference in practice, and none at all in principle, between rites of purification from taboo-contact and rites of purification from other occult influences. When Becwana travellers returned from foreign parts, they were not permitted to rejoin the family circle till they had been lustrated with 'holy water', or, sometimes, cleansed with that still more potent purifier, the gall of a sacrificed ox, so as to free them from any occult influence that may have touched them while abroad.<sup>855</sup> On the road, no man would light a fire on old ashes, lest he who used the fire before should have been cooking 'medicine' there. It was a common thing to purify an invalid, so that the magic of some unknown enemy might not cling to him and prevent his recovery. The ceremony of 'removing the darkness from the spears' by lustrating them with holy water, was one of the great annual functions in every Becwana tribe, and everybody believed that the spears of the hunters would miss their mark, or else glance off from the game, if not thus purified. Amongst the Basuto, "cattle captured in war had to be purified by fumigation before they could be allowed to mix with the herds of their captors";<sup>856</sup> for it was possible that the enemy, dreading the capture of his beloved herds, might have charged the beasts with occult influences that would decimate the herds of the plunderers. In describing the elaborate and barbarous ceremonial with which they were received by the Mwata Cazembe, in 1831, Monteiro and Gamitto mention<sup>857</sup> that two men were employed throwing aromatic herbs upon a pot of live coals that stood between the Cazembe and his visitors. It is likely that this fumigation was intended to purify the Cazembe from any sinister and occult influence which his distinguished visitors might consciously or unconsciously emit. The Becwana purified even their own flocks and herds. Cattle

<sup>855</sup> Nowadays, most Becwana do not strictly observe these customs, but there are still people in every tribe who walk punctiliously in the old ways.

<sup>856</sup> HB. 260.

<sup>857</sup> LC. 254.

were often fumigated to ward off disease. At every new moon, after the sheep were folded, a pot of *leshwaló*, as they called the mystic mixture, was burnt in the midst of each flock. Goats, strange to say, were not purified; indeed, some said that purification would kill goats. But dogs were purified if they did not turn out good hunters; for in such case it was assumed that some of their first prey must have been eaten by an unpurified widow or widower, or that he who cooked the flesh must have carelessly taken a brand from one side of the hearth on which the pot stood and placed it on the other, or that having scorched his fingers in turning the meat he must have put them into his mouth to cool them. To understand how such things can affect the dogs, one must know something of mimetic magic; but the point that concerns us here is that it is as needful to purify the dogs from the occult control of a careless cook as from the contamination of those who are under the taboo of widowhood, and that the method of purification is the same.

#### PENALTY OF BREAKING TABOO

As the rites of expurgation indicate, infraction of taboo is punished by invisible avengers. This comes out clearly in the case of taboos which are vindicable by lightning-stroke, or by the withdrawal of what are considered boons from the spirit-world: such as victory, the good fortune of the hunter or fisher, or the health or fertility of crops, herds and people. The seed which a pregnant woman sows, or the arable land over which she walks, is smitten with sterility. A blight falls upon the cattle that come into contact with an unpurified widower. A missionary, writing of Matebele customs as he found them in the decade preceding 1872, states that after the mourners and all who had anything to do with the burial had been purified by rites of lavation in running water, "the nearest relatives are then obliged to go and remain upon a neighbouring mountain or hill until an ox or a he-goat is brought him<sup>558</sup> which is to be offered to the gods, slaughtered and eaten by themselves, before again returning to the town; after which they are sanctified. Should they disregard this

<sup>558</sup> What seems like a careless change of pronoun is probably due to the writer's thought that the head of such a party would naturally act as priest for his group.

ceremony and return home unsanctified, they say that the cattle will fill the kraals with imperfect calves, the folds will abound with feeble lambs and kids, and the children unborn will be deformed.<sup>859</sup> An invalid suffers relapse, at the least, if a menstrual or pregnant woman, or other defiled person be admitted into his chamber. If the taboos of childbirth are violated, the infant suffers in mind or body, and some tribes hold that the parents lose fertility.<sup>860</sup> Infants, pups, chickens, sheep,<sup>861</sup> and other feeble things, droop and die if the shadow of a tabooed woman is cast upon them. "The Kikuyu state that they are afraid to get fire direct from another village in case they bring some unknown *thahu* along with it or with the firewood; they say it is such a great risk, particularly for the children, who might get thin and ill in consequence."<sup>862</sup> The iron ore in the furnace will yield nothing but slag if a woman enters the camp of the smelters. Even the wild beasts become fierce and the spears of the hunters glance harmlessly from the quarry if a wife of one of the party is either pregnant or unfaithful. It is the fate of a warrior to be wounded or slain if his wife is faithless while he is on the war-path.<sup>863</sup> The slayer is menaced by the spirit of the slain. The penalty of doing field-work on the day after the first heavy rain of the season, is that the crops will be poor, or that the 'sabbath-breaker' will be killed by lightning. If a man violates his totem-taboo, either he or his children will be afflicted with skin disease, or possibly with idiocy. Junod mentions two typical instances that can be matched in most Bantu tribes: the Kaha of the Shiluvane valley expect their children to be covered with boils or to become idiots if they eat the flesh of their totem-animal, the duyker; and the Mashila (Sekukuni's people) believe that the soles of their feet will become sore if they tread upon the dung of the porcupine, which is their totem.<sup>864</sup> "One of the principal totem animals among the Wakamba is a small antelope called *Ndoya* or *Ndwaya* which is a bush-buck. . . . It is related that some hunters once went out and killed a *Ndoya*

<sup>859</sup> *Eleven Years in Central South Africa*. By Thomas Morgan Thomas. p. 283.

<sup>860</sup> See also my pp. 130, 132.

<sup>861</sup> Sheep are thought to be very delicate; see SB. 346.

<sup>862</sup> Hobley in JRAL, 1911, p. 409; cf. SB. 295.

<sup>863</sup> ACC. 326.

<sup>864</sup> LSAT. i. 336.

and they all broke out into dreadful sores, so after that they made the *Ndoya* tabu."<sup>865</sup> I suppose this means that they recognized that it was their totem, though they did not know it before.

In our sense of the terms, taboos are magical rather than scientific; not what we mean by laws of health, whether trustworthy or fallacious, but maxims, thought to be culled from the wisdom of the ancients, telling what must be avoided for fear of exciting the inimical activity of puissant spirits. Spirits are thought to be very susceptible to influence: even the mimetic suggestion of death may cause them to send death; the pointing of a contemptuous finger at their rain-clouds annoys them as surely as it would annoy a neighbour if pointed at his possessions;<sup>866</sup> and in months when they are busy looking after the weather, smoke from the cremation of a dead man's clothes would cause them to suspend operations. The business of a magician, as we shall see later, is to enlist the aid of spirits on behalf of his clients; but some violations of taboo would nullify the best protective magic of the most skilful expert. Taboos of pregnancy and childbirth that aim at shielding the first faint glow of human vitality are found, upon the last analysis, to be rules for guarding it against potent spirits of men and things.

It is true that breach of taboo may be followed by penalties of another nature. "The misbehaviour of one may affect the smooth working of the system for the family, the clan, or even the nation. To put it in the Congo way, 'One man becomes the curse of a hundred.'"<sup>867</sup> Neighbours are quick to show that they are not siding with a taboo-breaker; they shun him till he is purged of his transgression. What is more, the violation of some taboos is held to affect the weather or the safety of the local community; and in such cases society intervenes in self-protection with a punishment that will bring the impenitent sinner to his senses or maybe remove him from their midst. Such punishments are, however, of a secondary sort: the offender is ostracised because he has become obnoxious to spirits whom it is foolish to flout; but unseen vindicators of ancestral law will deal with him, what-

<sup>865</sup> AK. 102.

<sup>866</sup> "Love me love my dog." To curse the gift is to insult the giver.

<sup>867</sup> WBT. 281.

ever the local community may do or not do, and deal also with those who stand by him.

A breach of taboo is sometimes said to incur the displeasure of 'evil spirits'; but the Bantu doctrine of evil spirits is dealt with on another page.

#### BANTU IDEA OF PERSONALITY

As an aid to the understanding of these taboos, we must seize, if we can, the Bantu idea of personality. In his essay *On Believing*,<sup>869</sup> Belloc lays stress on the necessity for grasping the mind of the age,—the things that were taken for granted during the period and never stated,—the belief that can only be deduced or guessed at from its secondary effects. He reverts to the same thought in his essay *On the Method of History*. "A man can be ever so accurately informed," he says, "as to the dates, the hours, the weather, the gestures, the type of speech, the very words, the soil, the colour, that between them all would seem to build up a particular event. But if he be not seized of the mind which lay behind all that was human in the business, then no synthesis of his knowledge is possible." He points out that this is not peculiar to any period, but common to all; and that if posterity is to judge us rightly, it must get at that which is never stated in our voluminous literature, but taken for granted.

This just canon of criticism must be applied to our study of the Bantu. If we are to appreciate the Bantu attitude towards taboo in particular and magic in general, we must grasp the mind which lies behind it and state the things that Bantu take for granted. Now, there is no such thing as a Bantu definition of personality; the concept is still vague and fluid; and the inchoate idea can only be deduced from its secondary effects. The initiated are rightly sceptical of the ability of any White-man to 'think black', especially of the one or two who give themselves out as past masters in this art; but progress is possible only where men are not afraid to make mistakes, and we must venture into the jungle.

The Bantu, like other people who are or were at a similar stage of development, not only interpret the external in personal

<sup>868</sup> See pp. 27-33, 110ff.

<sup>869</sup> *On Anything*. By H. Belloc.

terms, but they take it for granted (1) that everything in the world (animals, trees, and inanimate objects as well as men) has a personality of its own,—a soul, a spiritual entity that makes it what it is and enables it to do what it does; (2) that the personality of the individual extends to his secretions, his more intimate possessions, his name, and even his shadow; (3) that personality is separable from its tabernacle, and may be absorbed by another personality, whether for weal or woe, especially by those of the same kindred; and (4) that this absorption of one personality by another, either in whole or in part, can be accelerated or retarded by the occult introduction of other personalities. Now these four propositions<sup>870</sup> are so alien to the thought of Europe—modern Europe, at any rate—that they each demand some little attention.

## ANIMISM

Let us take first the attribution of a soul to each object in the world, whether animal, vegetable or mineral.<sup>871</sup> When Baila hunters have killed an elephant and returned to their village, they make an offering to Leza, "to the *mizhimo* ('the ancestral spirits'), and to the ghost (*muzhimo*) of the deceased elephant which has accompanied them to the village. Addressing this last they say: 'O spirit, have you no brothers and fathers who will come to be killed? Go and fetch them.' The ghost of the elephant then returns and joins the herd as guardian of the elephant who has 'eaten its name.' Observe," continues the author here quoted, "that they regard the elephants as acting as men act: one dies and another inherits his position, 'eats his name', as they say."<sup>872</sup> Bahera<sup>873</sup> carpenters have to propitiate the spirit of a tree before they cut it down for timber. The priest of the forest goes with the carpenter and pours the blood of a sacrificed animal on the roots of the tree, and they eat a sacred meal there. A similar ceremony has to be performed before the smelters may

<sup>870</sup> For propositions (2), (3) and (4) cf. RLR. chap. iv., noticing, however that its author is referring to human personality alone.

<sup>871</sup> Cf. RAC. 171.

<sup>872</sup> IPNR. i. 168.

<sup>873</sup> The Bahera claim to be descendants of an ancient Bantu tribe that was reduced to serfdom when the Bahuma became masters of Ankole (between L. Edward and L. Victoria).



fell a tree for the purpose of making charcoal for their fires; and the spirit of the hill must be propitiated before iron ore is dug.<sup>874</sup>

Rattray finds a similar conception of nature among the Ashanti. "In the animistic creed of Ashanti everything in nature, animate or inanimate, has its *sunsum* (soul or spirit), and the *osese* tree [out of which Ashanti stools are made] is no exception. This spirit has therefore to be propitiated, equally to guard against harm resulting to the persons who cut down the tree, as to the person who will eventually sit upon the completed stool."<sup>875</sup> They propitiate the spirit of a cedar-tree before felling it for the purpose of making a talking-drum of the kind which they call *ntumpane*; the spirit of the log that is cut from it; the spirit of the drum before the latter is dressed in its first cloth and also before it is first beaten;<sup>876</sup> and also before the serious business of drumming the names of the chiefs begins, upon any occasion, the spirits of the various materials of which the drum is made are each propitiated in turn, and summoned to enter for awhile that material which was once a portion of their habitation.<sup>877</sup>

"If water flows, if fire burns, if the stone remains in its place, if the spark springs forth from the tinder-box, if such a bark cures and another kills, if the seed springs up, the bird flies, and the monkey steals, that is because 'it is their manner'. Everything has its 'manner'."<sup>878</sup> Thus writes Le Roy in discussing *The Primitive in the Presence of Nature*. His peculiar use of the word 'manner' is not easily intelligible; it is probably due to familiarity with some vernacular expression (like the Secwana *mokgwa*) that is often upon the lips of Natives; but his meaning becomes a little clearer in another paragraph, which sets forth the opinion that the Blacks have of nature.<sup>879</sup> "Nature, in the multitudinous manifestations under which it appears to our senses, takes the form of a hierarchy, distinct categories, each of which has its place, with its specific qualities and its purpose. It has also, if you will excuse the impropriety of the terms, its families and tribes. As in the human species, which the primitive unconsciously uses

<sup>874</sup> SCA. 73, 163-64.

<sup>875</sup> AS. 296.

<sup>876</sup> AS. 258-262.

<sup>877</sup> AS. 265.

<sup>878</sup> RP. 49.

<sup>879</sup> RP. 55.

as the type of all the others, each one has its 'manner' and its sex. Its 'manner': that is its own distinctive nature, determined for each of the beings constituting the species by a certain *form*, to use the scholastic expression, or, if you prefer, a certain *soul*. But it is an inert soul in lifeless things, a living soul in the plant, a feeling soul in the animal, a reasoning soul in man, a phenomenal soul in the cosmic elements, a terrestrial soul in the earth, a celestial soul in the sky, a universal soul in the universe."

I am at a loss to discover just what this last sentence is intended to convey; it surely cannot mean that the Bantu classify souls in this refined philosophical manner; perhaps it is kinder to take it as a rhetorical assertion that each soul is thought to be like the body which it informs—an idea that readily commends itself to the Bantu,<sup>880</sup> though they do not elaborate it into a universal proposition. But there is another possible interpretation. After stating what he considers to be the Bantu idea of nature, he says:<sup>881</sup> "This idea which perceptibly differs from the views we have set forth of Réville, Pfleiderer, Tylor, and their disciples, perfectly explains the attitude of the primitive in the presence of nature, without making him what he is not, a brute and an idiot, incapable of distinguishing between the animate and the inanimate, putting all on the same plane as himself, and regarding as rational persons even the sun and moon as well as stones or trunks of old trees." Now I am wondering whether the puzzling sentence may not be an attempt to avoid the hole into which he thinks others have fallen. Of course the primitive (which is his fictitious and misleading synonym for Negrillos and Bantu) can and does distinguish between what we call 'the animate and the inanimate', and even between individuals of the same variety; that is not in point; what we want to discover is whether his principles of distinction are so similar to our own that we may use our words 'animate' and 'inanimate' without risk of being befogged by our own terminology.

Some anthropologists have advanced the theory that man at his lowest had the "sense of a vague, impersonal, ever-acting, universally diffused power, which, borrowing a word for it com-

<sup>880</sup> Cf. p. SB. 17.

<sup>881</sup> RP. 60.

mon to the whole Pacific is called *mana*."<sup>882</sup> Whether this belief, which is known as dynamism, was ever popular among Bantu, we do not know; but if so, they have outgrown this way of thinking and advanced to animism,<sup>883</sup> or the belief that there is a personal spirit, sometimes friendly and sometimes unfriendly, in everything living and non-living, which our philosophical guides regard as a secondary stage in the mental development of mankind and in the growth of religion. This has done much to thwart the progress of the people in knowledge: they have bent their energies upon the propitiation of the 'souls' of things, so as to avert their anger or enlist their aid, and have barely begun to comprehend the things themselves. Even when they almost stumbled upon some simple scientific truth, they made it square with their preconceived notions, instead of reaping the fruits of discovery. If an expert found, for instance, that certain substances were deleterious to human life, and that certain others assuaged the pain of a swelling, he ascribed both effects to indwelling spirits, and, having fitted the new-found

<sup>882</sup> MN. 2, and cf. RLR. chap. III. Although Codrington, whose book on *The Melaneseans* first brought the idea of *mana* into prominence among Western students, describes *mana* as an impersonal power or influence, not physical, and in a way supernatural (p. 119), 'which is believed by the natives to cause all such effects as transcend their conception of the regular course of nature' (p. 191), yet he distinctly states that it 'is always connected with some person who directs it', that spirits, whether disembodied souls or supernatural beings, have it and can impart it, but that 'it essentially belongs to personal beings to originate it, though it may act through the medium of water, or a stone, or a bone.' (p. 119.) Prof. Marett, in his illuminating study of the conception of *mana*, (*Threshold of Religion*, p. 118) writes: "*Mana* can come very near to meaning 'soul' or 'spirit', though without the connotation of wraith-like appearance. Tregear supplies abundant evidence from Polynesia. *Mana* from meaning indwelling power naturally passes into the sense of 'intelligence', 'energy of character', 'spirit'; and the kindred term *manawa* expresses 'heart', 'the interior man', 'conscience', 'soul'; whilst various other compounds of *mana* between them yield a most complete psychological vocabulary—words for thought, memory, belief, approval, affection, desire and so forth. Meanwhile, *mana* always, I think, falls short of expressing 'individuality'. Though immaterial it is perfectly transmissible." Also on p. 99: "Science may adopt *mana* as a general category to designate the positive aspect of the supernatural, or sacred, or whatever we are to call that order of miraculous happenings which, for the concrete experience, if not usually for the abstract thought of the savage, is marked off perceptibly from the order of ordinary happenings. *Tabu* on the other hand may serve to designate its negative aspect."

<sup>883</sup> The turn of this phrase is due to the fact that dynamists consider dynamism to be a more primitive form of thought than animism; but it seems easier to believe that men credited external objects with souls like their own long before they became sufficiently sophisticated to entertain abstract notions of energy, potency, principle, or force.

fact to the Procrustean bed of what he ignorantly deemed fundamentals of faith, racked his brains to discover an incantation that would effectually control the spirits within, but never troubled his head about the mere material—a variety of theological stupidity that bewilders us, unless it happens to be clad in clothes of our own conventional cut and colour! Animism is, however, the faith of a large section of the human race. The Hindu believes, to quote the apt phrase of a recent writer,<sup>884</sup> that 'all life, and everything that is, each stick and stone, is of one piece with God's life and his own'; and this belief of the Hindu is shared by many varieties of mankind which are more backward in material culture. "The prehistoric dwellers in Egypt believed that the earth, and the under-world, and the air, and the sky were peopled with countless beings, visible and invisible. . . . In nature and attributes these beings were thought by primitive man to closely resemble himself and to possess all human passions, and emotions, and weaknesses, and defects."<sup>885a</sup> We do not know whether the belief of the prehistoric dwellers in Egypt was shared by those who scattered similar implements far and wide over Africa; nor whether the Bantu race, cradled, if not born, at the headwaters of the Nile, owes its interpretation of the world to those more primitive inhabitants of that continent; but we do know that there is a strong family-likeness between the thought of prehistoric Egyptians and that of the Bantu of our own day.

Organs and tissues in our bodies which have lost their utility but correspond to parts that are still useful in organisms of a lower type, are called vestigial remains; vestiges, or footprints, which mark the path by which our forbears climbed to the uplands of physical existence upon which we were born. Perhaps the child's habit of imputing personality to its toys, scolding the wayward and praising the tractable, may be a vestige from distant days when its ancestors plodded their upward way through animistic conceptions of the world,<sup>885b</sup> for all the more

<sup>884</sup> Holland: *The Goal of India*, p. 9.

<sup>885a</sup> EM. p. viii.

<sup>885b</sup> Moore's interpretation of such behaviour (*Birth and Growth of Religion*, p. 11) is interesting; "The modern child who kicks or beats a stool over which he has stumbled does not do it because he confuses animate and inanimate objects; his instinctive and unreflecting reaction is that it meant to hurt him, and he

advanced families of mankind appear to have passed through that stage of wonder. Or can it be that the texture of the human mind predisposes an unsophisticated person (the dynamists notwithstanding) to assume that other bodies are endowed with a personality like its own. Whatever the explanation, animism is certainly a child's view of life; and it marks the immaturity, if not the youthfulness, of the Bantu race.

#### PERSONALITY INHERENT IN SECRECTIONS

Difficult as it is to adjust our thinking to such a naïve conception of personality, it is harder still to imagine that personality extends to the secretions; and yet our ancestors<sup>886a</sup> accepted this belief. Such stories as those of Acts v. 15 and xix, 11f. also owe their garb to this notion of personality, and Bantu converts unhesitatingly accept these stories at their face value, sure that Peter's shadow and Paul's towels and aprons must have been charged with the supernatural vigour of these saintly men. Although the Bantu do not identify breath, shadow, or name with the soul, they do appear to regard these as organs of personality. To cast a spell, Bantu magicians need nothing more than the name of the victim and some of his nail-parings, or even hair-clippings, or sweat scraped from his sandals or wooden pillow, or even the dust from his footprints.<sup>886b</sup> Brown, writing of the Becwana, states that "when a woman wishes to retain the

retaliates its attack upon him in a way from which we draw the erroneous inference that he imagines it to be alive. When a man trips on a rocking-chair in the dark and damns it, it is not because he attributes to it an immortal soul which he consigns to perdition; it is what he would say to a man who on purpose had put out his foot to break his shins or give him a fall. He knows a great deal better when he *thinks*; but the point is exactly that under the circumstances he reverts to the conduct of his unthinking ancestor." Marett's interpretation of a somewhat similar experience (*Threshold of Religion*, p. 40) is couched in more psychological phrases: "The lover, who yesterday perhaps was kissing the treasured glove of his mistress, today, being jilted, casts her portrait on the fire. Here let us note two things. Firstly, the mental digression, the fact that he is for the nonce so 'blind', as we say, with love or rancour, that the glove or the portrait has by association become substituted for the original object of his sentiments, namely his mistress. Secondly, the completeness of the digression. This dear glove fit only to be kissed, this hateful portrait fit only to be burned, occupies his whole attention, and is therefore equivalent to an irresistible belief that realizes itself as inevitably as a suggestion does in the case of a hypnotic patient. Such at least is the current psychological explanation of this phenomenon known as 'primitive credulity'."

<sup>886a</sup> Cf. RAC. 194.

<sup>886b</sup> Cf. Bg. 344f., WA. 215, ACC 272.

affections of her husband she will rub her hands and arms with . . . medicinal charm ointment and, after rubbing it off, will mix the rubbings into which part of herself will now have gone with his food, unknown to him." He adds, "this is believed by many women to be a most potent love philtre, provided the medicines used are of the right sort and strength."<sup>887</sup> Certain substances known to the magician are thought to promote the absorption of personality; but the essential element in this prescription is the sweat from the woman's body, and most Bechwana women know of other secretions that can be trusted to do the trick without the aid of an adjuvant.<sup>888</sup> In Kikuyu, people who have the 'evil eye' (a withering power that is independent of volition) counteract the baleful influence of their glance by applying the undiluted saliva of their morning fast to the person whom they have looked at; and if they enter a village, they are asked in a friendly way to prevent unpleasant consequences to the children by spitting upon them.<sup>889</sup> When a Mweithaga (a clan in that country that is credited with uncanny powers) quarrels with an outsider, he is asked to spit upon the luckless wight, so as to obviate maleficent effects.<sup>890</sup> Akamba parents spit on their new-born baby to bring it luck, and friends who pay their respects to the little stranger do likewise.<sup>891</sup> Roscoe writes: "Spitting on the hands or person of a suppliant was a sign of favour, and a priest [of the Bachwezi] always spat upon a thing to give it a blessing before handing it to anyone."<sup>892</sup> When the king of the Bakitara provided sacrificial victims, "the animals had generally to swallow some of the king's saliva upon plantain leaves" the night before they were sacrificed.<sup>893</sup> "If a Mukamba cuts his hair or his nails," writes Hobley, "he throws the cuttings into a thicket, for it is believed that if anyone picked any of them up, and burned them, the owner would fall ill. This is a very widespread belief and is traceable to the idea that hair, etc., contains part of the spiritual essence of the owner,"<sup>894</sup> and

<sup>887</sup> ABN. 139.

<sup>888</sup> Pubic hair, e.g., or a bit of the placenta of their own delivery.

<sup>889</sup> BBM. 177f.

<sup>890</sup> BBM. 183.

<sup>891</sup> AK. 21; cf. SB. 184.

<sup>892</sup> KT. 26.

<sup>893</sup> KT. 36; cf. SB. 352, 399f.

<sup>894</sup> Cf. SB. 30, 262, 269, 331f., 364, also, my p. 1035.

that the owner is capable of feeling an injury done to any part of himself, even after it is separated from him."<sup>895</sup> In the Mweru-Bangweulu district, the diviner spits a blessing all over his divining instruments, and sometimes the spirits direct him to spit a blessing over his patient that she may recover.<sup>896</sup> A Bemba father, mother, or chief bestows a blessing upon their 'children' in this manner: "The ancient spits a little saliva on them, then rubs them with his hand, saying: 'May God cure you! May he protect you during your journey! May he give you to eat! May he bring you back in good health!'"<sup>897</sup> In Gabon, "when parents bid good-bye to their child, when a chief parts from his guest, or when any one receives a valuable present, he takes the head or the hand of the child, the guest, or the giver, saying: *iboto* (blessing)! At the same time his lips emit a rapid breath along with a little saliva."<sup>898</sup> To express his regret for having wounded a neighbour and his wish for the man's recovery, a Mosuto had solemnly to expectorate on the wound, and also to sacrifice a sheep; and although the sacrifice has now fallen into desuetude, spitting on the wound is still generally accepted as proof of the absence of malice aforethought.<sup>899</sup> Kind old men of the Becwana tribes spit upon the heads of children, laying sometimes a hair or two from their own heads upon the saliva, as a way of bestowing their blessing.<sup>900</sup> At the beginning of the planting season, the Pokomo, who dwell on the right bank of the Tana River, after praying that the ancestors will preside over their gardening operations, spit upon their hoes, saying: 'May my hoe dig deep into the wet ground!'<sup>901</sup> In the West of England, when I was a boy, youngsters used to spit upon the first coin earned in an undertaking, or upon any little thing they found on the road, 'for luck', as they said—a practice which had become a mere piece of juvenile inanity, whatever it may have meant for our

<sup>895</sup> AK. 101.

<sup>896</sup> IHB. 226-27.

<sup>897</sup> RP. 200.

<sup>898</sup> RP. 200.

<sup>899</sup> HB. 269.

<sup>900</sup> In Ashanti, at the naming of a child after its paternal grandfather, the latter spits in the child's mouth to strengthen the spirit already there, which is his own *ntoro* (spirit). AS. 54. Konde spit on the breast and back of a sick child and pray to their divinity: 'Let thy spittle be cool upon him.' SRK. 201.

<sup>901</sup> RP. 197.

pagan forefathers; but to the Bantu the emission of a little saliva is still a meaningful method of identifying a petitioner with his petition.<sup>902</sup> The Banziri, a tribe dwelling in the north-west Mubangi district, place the body of a dead chief on a sort of grid-iron of poles, and kindle a fire under the body. "Receptacles of baked earth are placed so as to collect the melted fat which trickles from the body under the action of the fire. Those who are present smear faces and hands with this fat, rinse it off with warm water, and these rinsings are drained into vessels and drunk by the relatives, who believe that in this way they incorporate in themselves the virtues and qualities of the deceased."<sup>903</sup> When a Kafir went to war, his sleeping-mat was placed at the spot in the hut marked off as sacred to the ancestor-spirits. Kidd explains the custom: "A man's sleeping-mat is impregnated with his perspiration and dirt, as every one who has visited a Kafir hut knows. The mat is never, or very rarely, washed, and has to be burnt at the man's death, or else has to be buried with him. The mat therefore contains a concentrated and essential part of the man's personality, and so is an organic part of the man himself. It is placed near the favourite spot which the *itongo* haunts, and is thus in connection with the distant owner in a most intimate way; the man's personality harks back to the hut through his intimate connection with the *itongo*, and also with the sleeping-mat. Thus the man's mat is virtually a part of his 'self', and is in organic connection with him."<sup>904</sup>

Recourse is had to the same idea in freeing a patient from certain diseases. If a Zulu has *isidhlalo*, (a disease caused by *itongo*), the doctor takes blood from the patient, mixes it with 'medicine', buries it in an ant-hill, closes the hole with a stone, and leaves the place without looking back; or he takes blood from the most painful spot, places it in the mouth of a frog, and carries the little creature gently back to its place. The disease is thus barred out.<sup>905</sup>

<sup>902</sup> Cf. the '*Tsu!*' formula SB. 191, 260, which is frequently mentioned in LSAT. and IPNR.

<sup>903</sup> GGC. 651-52.

<sup>904</sup> SC. 69.

<sup>905</sup> RSZ. 315 ff.



"A girl's first menstruation is a very critical period of her life according to Akamba beliefs. If this condition appears when she is away from the village, say at work in the fields, she returns at once to her village, but is careful to walk through the grass and not on a path, for if she followed a path and a stranger accidentally trod on a spot of blood and then cohabited with a member of the opposite sex before the girl was better again it is believed that she would never bear a child."<sup>906</sup>

Once we grasp this idea of the close relation between personality and secretions, it is easier to understand the ritual of blood-brotherhood, the central act of which consists in each contracting party swallowing a little of the other's blood.<sup>907</sup>

Whether extension of personality to personal possessions is due to the fact that in Africa such things are usually coated with exudations from the body,<sup>908</sup> is doubtful. That theory would explain most cases, but not all. In their New Year Ceremony, Becwana insist that all members of the family should be smeared with the curcurbitacea in strict order of precedence; but if a son is unavoidably absent, it is enough to smear his wooden porridge-bowl—a *peculiar* possession (if one may use an old word in a sense that is rapidly becoming obsolete) which seems unlikely to absorb much of its owner's secretions.<sup>909</sup>

#### PERSONALITY INHERENT IN THE SHADOW

The shadow of a menstruous or pregnant woman saps the strength of creatures so young that they have as yet gained but a feeble hold on life;<sup>910</sup> and that of an unpurified slayer blights even an adult. Baganda never sit so that their shadow falls on food; do not like others to tread upon their shadow or to spear it; and believe that children may die if they see their shadow cast on the wall of a house.<sup>911</sup> A similar fear of having one's shadow trampled under foot prevails in Kavirondo, but does not extend to Kikuyu.<sup>912</sup> "The shadow that is seen, they say it is a person,"

<sup>906</sup> AK. 65.

<sup>907</sup> Cf. e. g. WBA. 112, RP. 79.

<sup>908</sup> See pp. 137, 203f.

<sup>909</sup> What is the reason for our extreme reluctance to eat anything from another person's plate?

<sup>910</sup> Cf. pp. 128, 232ff.

<sup>911</sup> Bg. 23.

<sup>912</sup> BBM. 29.

said a Mwila. "When a person dies, the corpse remains alone and the shadow goes to God. It is sorcerers who say they will take the shadow while he is still living and the body will remain by itself. The sorcerer takes the shadow and goes to work on it with medicine, and having done that, why the man dies."<sup>913</sup> It may be that the Baila use the term 'shadow' in a metaphoric sense, as we use the term 'spirit'; but if so, the above statement makes it abundantly clear that the metaphoric use is not so sharply separated from the literal as to obviate confusion. Junod says<sup>914</sup> that the Thonga seem to use 'shadow' as a name for the departed soul, rather than for the psychic principle of the living man; that they do not fear to tread upon the shadow of a person; and that he is not sure that they identify the shadow with the spiritual part of man which separates from his body at death, though they evidently connect it with the vital principle. Modern Becwana do not resent having their shadows trodden upon; but, like Basuto, and ancient Romans, for the matter of that, they sometimes refer to the dead as 'Shades' (*diriti*), and some of their customs leave little room for doubt that their forefathers regarded a person's shadow as capable of blighting or blessing those upon whom it falls.

#### PERSONALITY INHERENT IN THE NAME

Sorcerers of that section of the Baluba tribe that dwells between the Kasai and Sankuru Rivers, "also assert that they can steal away a man's personality and leave his body a mere mindless automaton, 'an empty ear of corn.' They pretend to accomplish it thus:—A negro is walking calmly and thoughtfully along: suddenly he hears his name, looks round, and see nothing; slightly disturbed, he pursues his walk, but hears himself called again; again he looks around and still sees nothing. He is now filled with the paralysing dread that his soul has been called out of him, stolen by an invisible *Muloshi*; he is no longer more than a shadow of himself, an image which before long will dis-

<sup>913</sup> IPNR. ii. 93. The reference here is to an occult method of enslaving a person's soul and compelling it thereafter to dance unseen attendance upon the sorcerer in his nefarious pursuits—a belief which seems to imply some crude notion of hypnotism and the assumption that the hypnotic state is not terminated by death.

<sup>914</sup> LSAT. ii. 339.

solve, unless he betakes himself in all haste to a magician."<sup>915</sup> Here the sorcerer obtains control of the personality through the name, instead of through the shadow, as Baila sorcerers have been shown to do.

Few things surprise the modern mind more than the ubiquity of the belief in the efficacy of names and their identification with personality. "In primitive psychology, the name is part of the personality, and the soul or power of the individual inheres in it; therefore he who has the name of a person, whether human, superhuman, or divine, can exercise a certain control over him by means of its magical application."<sup>916</sup> In Egypt, "it was believed that if a man knew the name of a god or a devil, and addressed him by it, he was bound to answer him and do whatever he wished; and the possession of the knowledge of the name of a man enabled his neighbour to do him good or evil. . . . To the Egyptian the name was as much a part of a man's being as his soul, or his double (Ka), or his body, and it is quite certain that this view was held by him in the earliest times."<sup>917</sup> Isis discovered the true name of Ra by a ruse, and from that moment became mistress over him and all the lesser gods. In ancient Italy the real names of the gods were concealed, lest they should come to the knowledge of those who might use them *to compel the gods to work harm upon the people. The fairies of British legends are very averse to having their names known, because they are reluctant to subject themselves to human control. From aboriginal America, Polynesia, Australia, India, and Europe, Tylor has culled instructive examples of the sacredness and mystery that clings to names, and of the belief that to mention the name of the dead is to evoke their ghosts.*<sup>918</sup> In India two names are sometimes given to a person at birth, one secret and for ceremonial purposes, and the other for daily use. The infantile or 'rice-name' is never used in China, lest sorcerers should hear it and work malignant spells. Abyssinians conceal the baptismal name for the same reason, but are careful to use it in prayers for the dead; and they use the formula 'In the name of

<sup>915</sup> GGC. 660. Cf. also SB. 311.

<sup>916</sup> ER. 184.

<sup>917</sup> EM. 157.

<sup>918</sup> EHM. 139-144.

the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost' as a spell. Speaking of modern Muslims, Lane says:<sup>919</sup> "The highest attainment in divine magic consists in the knowledge of the 'Ism el-Aazam.' This is 'the most great name' of God, which is generally believed, by the learned, to be known by none but prophets and apostles of God. A person acquainted with it can, it is said, by merely uttering it, raise the dead to life, kill the living, transport himself instantly wherever he pleases, and perform any other miracle. Some suppose it to be known to eminent welees." And he states, also,<sup>920</sup> that it is a custom of many learned and devout persons, and some others, to say, 'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,' on locking a door, covering bread, laying down their clothes at night, and on other occasions; believing that this protects their property from genii.

In most sections of the Christian Church, the test of validity of baptism is whether it has been administered in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and one often hears a similar formula attached to prayers as if it gave wings to petitions that would otherwise fail to reach the throne of God. Buddhist, Roman, and Anglican monks are at one in the practice of taking a religious name at initiation—names, presumably, by which, like the ancient Egyptians, they are known in the invisible world.

It was the prevalence of this ancient belief that name and personality are one, and that to give one's name away is to put oneself in the hands of another, which gave point to such passages in the Old Testament as Gen. xvii. 5, xxxii. 28-9, Ex. xxxiii. 17, and Judg. xiii. 18; and the prohibition of using the name of God thoughtlessly is closely related.

Now Bantu ideas accord remarkably well with this strange but world-wide notion. Though every individual has a secondary name or two, which is kept for public use, it is unusual for members of a family to address one another, or refer to one another, by name; they use terms of relationship instead. Some Europeans have inherited a primitive shyness at giving their own names; but Bantu are much more reluctant, and look to a com-

<sup>919</sup> MCME. 270-71.

<sup>920</sup> MCME. 231.

panion to help them out of the difficulty. The name which the companion gives is, however, never the person's real name; in the days of undiluted tribalism that was known only to his most intimate friends,<sup>921</sup> the reason for keeping it secret being dread of a sorcerer's spells. To accost an important person even by his public name is considered very rude; you should greet him by his titles, or the name of his totem, or one of those epithets which the Bantu call 'praise-names.' In some tribes it is customary to change the birth-name for a new name at the Initiation Rites.<sup>922</sup>

The only name which the Bantu regard as imbued with personality is, however, the birth-name. A man of the Bamangwato tribe who had long passed the meridian of life was deserted by both his wives, and the women took their children with them. Friends urged him to insist upon the return of his bairns, but, being a peaceable old man, he jogged quietly along, weeping like a tortoise within its own shell, as the Natives say, and after a while comforted himself by marrying another woman. Thereupon his would-be advisers sneered that he was too old to father a fresh family, and the sneer rankled in the old man's soul. In due time, however, the new wife bore him a son, and he cried out in his limitless delight, *Modimoecho ga o laolwe!* ('The god of our fathers is not restrained!') That fixed the boy's name. He had brought his bride from a distant home into an uncongenial circle; and she, being of a sensitive and confiding disposition and much younger than her husband, had grown lonely in the months of gestation; but when she looked upon her babe, she cried in her first wave of maternal affection, *Beco ba tsile!* ('My kin has come!'). And that settled the boy's second name. Before he set himself, at his chief's command, to teach me the manners and customs of his people, this babe had become an old man. Everybody called him *Modimecho*, when they did not use one of his courtesy titles; that was all they knew. But he told me that when intimate friends uttered his full name, which they very rarely did, and especially if they added *Beco-ba-tsile*, they could count upon his compliance with their wishes; "for," said he, "to call me by these names is like saying, 'I am your friend, and your father's friend', and my heart softens within me."

<sup>921</sup> Cf. Bg. 135.

<sup>922</sup> A. i. 423, TWA. 531.

These are the names that have magical value, and unlimited mischief may be wrought by a magician or a witch who discovers them. By the magical utterance of such names, witches, when assembled for their ghoulish midnight feasts, are thought to compel the dead to come forth unresisting from their graves;<sup>923</sup> and it is by such names that the magician casts his spells, not the name which one bears in public.

When the heir to a dead man's status and effects is said to 'eat the name' of his deceased relative, it is the status-name that is alluded to—the name that he bore as head of his group, not the birth-name in which his personality inhered. "An old Ngoo man, still alive," remarks a recent writer,<sup>924</sup> "is proud of having killed an Angoni on this occasion, and tells how he took his shield, his feathers, and his name." I have not happened upon such a case, but I presume that the victor took either the status-name or the public name of the vanquished: he could hardly have discovered the real name.

A similar notion of the relation between the name and personality of animals is prevalent in Africa. Where lions abound, no one ever says 'lion,' lest a lion should come at the mention of its name; prudence calls for some such phrase as 'our tawny friend',<sup>925</sup> or for periphrasis if not for euphemism. The ordinary word for leopard in some Karanga vernaculars, *kamba*, "means 'thief' and is one of many instances of calling a dreaded beast or reptile by a nickname or paraphrase so as not to attract its attention."<sup>925</sup> Natives are just as reluctant to speak of death; Africa has as many euphemisms for death as China has;<sup>927</sup> but Africans regard death as a call from the spirit-world,<sup>929</sup> not as a personality, and their reluctance to mention it is akin to their avoidance of actions that suggest funerals to the spirits.<sup>928</sup>

<sup>923</sup> NBCA. 88, 168.

<sup>924</sup> NGW. 103. Ngoo is a village about half-way up the eastern shore of L. Nyasa.

<sup>925</sup> CSBSL. ii. 75n.

<sup>926</sup> Cf. SRK. 96-7.

<sup>927</sup> Cf. RAA. 108.

<sup>929</sup> It is true that Bantu regard most deaths as due to witchcraft, but the iniquity of the witch consists in illicit control of spirits.

<sup>928</sup> See pp. 253ff.

## CONTAGION OF PERSONALITY

The separability of soul and body scarcely enters into the Bantu conception of death. They hug the belief that the spirit hovers over the remains of its earthly tabernacle till the gates of the nether world are opened to it by sacrifice, and even keeps in touch with these relics for many years after.<sup>930</sup> Nevertheless, they make no doubt that adepts in wizardry can steal a person's soul,<sup>931</sup> or hide it for safety in some external object;<sup>932</sup> and in the manufacture of charms they discriminate between spirit and shrine, holding that when the shrine is broken the spirit escapes. But if two bodies are brought together, the peculiar property of the one personality is believed to be absorbed by that of the other. Certain beetles in Bechuanaland are said to live for months without nutriment, suspended in the air by a thread; and, since they evidently possess the power to prolong life in spite of adverse circumstances, Becwana mothers tie two or three of them to the hair of a delicate babe and perhaps one or two to its cincture, believing that the child will absorb this peculiar power from the insect.

The tendency of one personality to catch the qualities of another through physical contact is prominent in Bantu magic, in many taboos, and in the notion that a person under contamination from taboo-contact is himself a source of magical infection to others. In taboos of pregnancy and childbirth there seems to be almost complete interfusion of personality between husband and wife;<sup>933</sup> and many other customs point to the same conclusion. Among the Bagesu of Mt. Elgon, the husband of a pregnant woman "had to refrain from climbing any trees or high rocks or on to house roofs, and when walking down hill he had to go carefully, for should he slip and fall, his wife might have a miscarriage."<sup>934</sup> When a Tumbuka woman in advanced pregnancy stumbled over a stone twice in the same day, the women who had seen her stumble exclaimed at once that her husband, who was from home, must have committed adultery, and with-

<sup>930</sup> See SB. 32-42.

<sup>931</sup> See SB. 311, and my page 237f.

<sup>932</sup> See SB. 156f., and cf. WBT. 204f., 290.

<sup>933</sup> See pp. 128f., 132, 171.

<sup>934</sup> GS 24.

out further evidence they hounded him out of the village.<sup>935</sup> When a man of the Yao tribe is absent on a journey, "his wife must not bathe, nor anoint herself with oil, nor even wash her face, and if she has a dream during this period, she must be very careful about presenting an offering to the spirits."<sup>936</sup> What the wife does or fails to do may affect the husband a hundred miles away.<sup>937</sup> In Uganda the father of a suckling jumps over the child's bedding and over his wife before starting on a journey; otherwise if he had sexual connection with another woman, the child would die and the woman would fall ill.<sup>938</sup> We remarked on a former page<sup>939</sup> that in Uganda jumping over a person or thing is a symbolical substitute for very close bodily contact. It is a far cry from Uganda to Kafraria, both geographically and philologically, though both communities are Bantu; but in Kafraria, "stepping over a person sleeping is highly improper, and if a wife steps over her husband he cannot hit his enemy in war; if over his assegais" (which are the most intimate of his possessions) "they are from that time useless, and are given to boys to play with, so too with his walking-sticks."<sup>940</sup> One of the most striking illustrations of the interfusion of personality between husband and wife is found in connection with a disease known to the Amalala as *umsizi*. This disease is said to be marked by intense darkening of the skin, contraction of the tendons with excessive pain, and severe pain in the finger or toe from which it shifts to different parts of the body, especially the joints. Sometimes a jealous husband secretly takes a certain 'medicine', which he buys from the *umsizi*-doctors, and then has intercourse with his wife; and, though the 'medicine' has no physical effect, she is from that moment so charged with its magical potency that her paramour will be afflicted with *umsizi* next time he has dealings with her.<sup>941</sup>

Affinity counts for much in taboo. Although the food that a dead man has left in his pots, calabashes, or milk-sacks, and the

<sup>935</sup> WPP. 145.

<sup>936</sup> NBCA. 188.

<sup>937</sup> Cf. pp. 172f, 224.

<sup>938</sup> Bg. 17.

<sup>939</sup> See p. 130.

<sup>940</sup> LA. 209.

<sup>941</sup> RSZ. 237.



milk of his cows is taboo to people of his kindred, others may eat of it with impunity. The flesh of the totem animal is taboo to people who are akin to it, but others partake of it without fear of contamination. If such an animal happens to be caught in a trap set by one of its kinsmen for another purpose, the trapper dares not touch it, and makes it an apology for the disaster of which he was the unintentional cause; but, hating to waste good meat, he throws a long cord round it and drags it away as food for some neighbour of another totem.

#### OCCULT CONTROL OF THE ABSORPTION OF PERSONALITY

The belief that the absorption of one personality by another may be accelerated or retarded by occult devices is the core of Bantu magic: a bewildering subject that requires another volume for its investigation.

#### NATURE OF BANTU TABOOS<sup>243</sup>

Bantu taboos are the 'Thou-shalt-nots' of homœopathic and contagious magic: ostensible laws of health and social safety. But that does not mean that they originated in arbitrary and unreasonable enactments. Science, like religion, is contemporary with humanity and was once steeped in an animistic conception of the world; and taboos are inductions drawn from the experience of magically-minded observers who had not yet learnt to distinguish between sequence and consequence: queer blunders strewn upon the path by which man came to his present knowledge of nature. The Bantu, still loitering at the animistic stage of intellectual development, hold that taboos are grounded in the very nature of things. "The breaking of the Ikina [taboo] is not a sin against God", wrote Torday in expounding Bushongo belief,<sup>244</sup> "it is a foolhardy act against the laws of nature, like overeating, or taking poison, and the punishment is generally sterility." And again: "Bad actions were not punished by God; their opposition to the laws of nature caused automatically, without divine interference, some unpleasant reaction. Thus, if the firstfruits were not presented to the ancestors it was the soil,

<sup>243</sup> Students should read also IHR. Chaps. VI., VII., VIII.

<sup>244</sup> OTB. 195.

deprived of the strength that had its source in this pious action, which would not bring forth the crops; it would remain barren as if no seeds had been sown. If a man broke the laws forbidding the marrying within his own clan, it was the blood of the clan in him that suffered the pollution and made him suffer in his turn."<sup>945</sup> On the main point Torday is correct; but one or two of his phrases are a little too spacious. The punishment is often, but not 'generally', sterility. Fertility of the soil is attributed to the divine ancestors; the pious acts of the tribesman are only mediatorial. 'Without divine interference' is an unhappy phrase in this connection, because the Bantu, disinclined to discriminate between natural and spiritual, credit their divine ancestors with a constant concern for ancient laws and customs; but Torday, caught by the bewitching simplicity of catchwords, is using 'divine' in the sense of God with a capital G. With these grains of allowance, however, Torday's interpretation of taboo is unimpeachable.

"But," says the objector, "how can a tribesman hold this belief, knowing as he must that people of other clans flout taboos that he respects and dread taboos that he laughs at?" Well, for one thing, he holds himself superior to people of other clans. "What can you expect from such a clan as that!" he exclaims; "don't they dabble on the sly with forms of protective magic that our people are too respectable to touch? Besides, people are not all alike; one man's meat is another man's poison; but our fathers told us long ago what *we* ought to avoid." Even when something that he himself thought to be taboo turns out to be harmless, which seldom happens to people whose pains are largely the product of their own terror, he sheds the faulty formula and keeps his faith serene; just as we should do with our faith in natural law if we found a flaw in what we had taken for a correct statement of invariable sequence between specified conditions and specified phenomena. And he is greatly puzzled when White-men inquire whether taboos are imposed by chiefs or medicine-men of bygone ages. 'Impose' does not chime with his conception of taboo. Medicine-men, especially diviners, sometimes discover that a patient is subject to some taboo that he

<sup>945</sup> OTB. 236f.

was not aware of; but it is one thing to say that Newton discovered the law of gravitation, and quite another to say that he imposed it upon the world.

The Bantu contention that taboo is independent of volition is quite in keeping with this definition of it. To borrow Smith's illustration,<sup>946</sup> he who touches a live wire receives a shock, whether he does it accidentally or intentionally, for a good purpose or a bad. According to ancient Hebrew tradition, Uzzah's pious intention did not save him from the consequence of breaking taboo.<sup>947</sup> That is characteristic of taboo; the penalty falls ruthlessly upon the taboo-breaker, whether his action springs from accident, ignorance, or intention, good motives or bad.<sup>948</sup> During menstruation and pregnancy, for example, a woman is believed to be fraught with peril, especially to feeble things,<sup>949</sup> no matter how wholesome her personal habits or how benevolent her purpose: it is contact that tells, even though it be but contact with her shadow.<sup>950</sup> Mimetic taboos conform to the same rule:<sup>951</sup> whatever is suggested by the action of the violator of one of these taboos is expected to happen, and the feeling that he cherishes does not count. Taboos seem to be now more closely related to spirits of the dead than to spirits of things,<sup>952</sup> probably because they were rigorously observed by generation after generation of the high-born who are held to have carried with them into the discarnate life their pertinacious insistence upon

<sup>946</sup> This illustration may help students who are steeped in Western thought, but would never occur to the Bantu. The point of similarity is the release of hidden energy that causes disaster; but Bantu magic, positive and negative, is all of a piece, and some of it seems hopelessly bewildering unless the energy is conceived as personal. At least, that is my view; my friend has come to a different conclusion. He thinks it enough to credit the Bantu with "belief in a mysterious hidden impersonal force which can be tapped and put to the use of men." I don't. He thinks they are dynamists: I think they are animists. But, after all, no one is wise enough to lay down the law on this question: the best we can do, at present, is to feel cautiously for the facts; and Smith is a careful student of Bantu behaviour. He who would form a reliable and independent judgment on this question must give due consideration to RLR, Chaps. III. & IV., to which I have referred above.

<sup>947</sup> 1 Sam. vi. 6ff.; 1 Chron. xiii. 7ff.

<sup>948</sup> Cf. SRK. 94, but see also SB. 234 and BBM. 118 (No. 58) for exceptional cases in which ignorance is said to soften the penalty.

<sup>949</sup> See pp. 122ff.

<sup>950</sup> See pp. 122ff., 126, 128ff., 236f.

<sup>951</sup> See pp. 253-256.

<sup>952</sup> See pp. 253-256.

all ancient customs; but this distinctive feature of taboo was not thereby changed, because the mighty dead themselves are sensitive to what their children do and say, but not to what they secretly desire.<sup>953</sup> Of course, competent magicians can cope with any emergency, and their expert advice will often ward off disaster if a man has to violate a taboo;<sup>954</sup> but this, if Smith's metaphor holds, may be likened to insulation—wear the magical equivalent of rubber gloves and no harm will befall you in touching a live wire.

#### ARE TABOOS INTERDICTS?

"When the primitive is about to lay hands on some fruits of nature," says Le Roy,<sup>955</sup> "he first recalls that this product has an immanent power able to turn against him and that, also, it has an owner in that Universal Master whose distant, vague, but certain and dreadful presence is felt everywhere. . . . Finding himself between these mysterious exactions and the necessity of living, man has felt that he could not make use of nature with unlimited and unrestrained freedom. He will, then, first of all be careful to acknowledge the just rights of the invisible and sovereign Master who keeps himself hid from view behind the visible world, although he does reveal his presence from time to time. Each time the Negrillos establish a new encampment, after clearing the place, they begin by making a fire on which each one puts a branch. If everything passes without incident, it means that the encampment is good; but if, in this first fire, a twig doubles up, it means that the earth protests and that it is futile to camp there; the place is at once abandoned and they go further on. Nature has her secrets and mysteries. She does not like everybody to take them from her and often avenges herself on the audacious who compel her to give them up. When they clear a forest, when they dig into the earth to get the water or the metals that she is hiding, when they establish their encampment or village in certain places, has it not often been observed that accidents or diseases stop the invader? It is nature defending herself." All this looks as though taboos are grounded

<sup>953</sup> See SB. 79f., 392ff. and 415.

<sup>954</sup> See pp. 125, 129.

<sup>955</sup> RP. 58f.

in nature as the 'primitive' sees it; but our author proceeds: "It is necessary, first of all, to recognize the rights of nature and nature's Master, and to use his gifts with precaution and reserve. That is why, in primitive society, the head of the family and of the tribe makes use of his authority, the character of which is nearly always sacred, to interdict certain products, certain acts, certain places, certain things, certain persons. This interdict can be removed only by the authority that imposed it, after a particular ceremony destined to restore the freedom of usage by a sort of expiation or sacrifice. It is the legal principle of the *sacred interdict* or *taboo*, which we shall have occasion to treat later under the question of morals." Le Roy is justified in saying that the head of a Bantu community authoritatively prohibits what he regards as taboo; but since that is so, the interdict cannot be the taboo. Let criticism wait, however, till we know what else he says about taboo under the question of morals.

"The Master of things," he writes,<sup>956</sup> "when he conceals himself from the eyes of men, is only the more to be feared; by unexpected manifestations he frequently reveals himself and checks our immoderate desire to put hands on everything. . . . In other words, if the universe appears stretched out before men like a well-laden table, there are, nevertheless, certain precautions to take before sitting down at it, certain forms of politeness to be observed, certain restrictions to bear in mind. For safety, then, it is necessary 'to know'. And who will know, if not the 'seer', the man in relation with the invisible, the priest who is at the same time, in primitive societies, the leader, the patriarch, the head of the family, of the clan, or of the tribe? He it is who has been enlightened by a dream, forewarned by some inner or external notice, instructed by some experience, perhaps a painful one; it is for him to tell his followers what is proper and what is not, what is forbidden, what must not be eaten, what must not be touched, what must not be pronounced, what must not be done. Once the interdict has been thus solemnly pronounced by the religious authority in the name of the higher Power whose will must be respected, absolute obedience is imposed under pain of compromising the whole community. In our

<sup>956</sup> RP. 148f.

judgment, such is the initial principle of the law of taboo. This principle has a double function. On one hand it separates the *sacred* from the *profane* and provides a place apart for whatever, in our external and visible world, is related to the supernatural by appointment, service, and special consecration. Sacred persons, objects, places, ceremonies, all these must be kept apart in the use men make of them and must not be confused with the rest, with what each one may touch at will: for they have all felt the influence of the invisible world, are attributed to it, have become its property, have been *consecrated* to it. No one may henceforth lay hands on them except those who in fact or by identical consecration belong to that same world. In this sense we may say that the taboo is at the basis of religious worship. But on the other hand, it is at the basis of law, consequently of morality, and hence of civilization—all placed under the protection of the religious authority which designates, sanctions, and *consecrates* whatever it touches."

Some of these pronouncements challenge attention.

I suppose Le Roy means "God" when he says "Universal Master", "invisible and sovereign Master", "nature's Master", or "the Master of things". If he does, he affirms that the 'primitive' regards taboo both as nature's method of defending herself and man's method of acknowledging God's just rights over nature. The former statement may pass, upon the presumption that 'nature' is interpreted in the 'primitive' way;<sup>959</sup> but the latter can carry no authority till supported by conclusive evidence; and I have failed to find such evidence on the pages of any writer, or in my field-work among the Bantu. Le Roy, strange to say, buttresses this astonishing statement with an instance of divination, which upon his own showing "means that the earth protests",<sup>957</sup> not that God has been brought into the transaction, and which I interpret, like the analogous practice that Melland found among the Bakaonde,<sup>958</sup> as a way of finding out whether the spirits of those who formerly claimed that land would be resentful if others pitched their camp there.

<sup>959</sup> See my *Race Problems in the New Africa*, Chap. ii. "Spirits of Things".

<sup>957</sup> RP. 58.

<sup>958</sup> WBA. 138f., quoted on my p. 8.

Le Roy is wrong in assuming that "taboo" is synonymous with "sacred" or "consecrated". The utmost that can be said without ignoring facts is that many consecrated things are taboo, and that taboo contained the germ from which the Hebrew idea of holiness sprang.<sup>960</sup> Some consecrated things are not taboo in the estimation of the Bantu,<sup>961</sup> and many taboo things (perhaps most of them) are not sacred, while some are the very reverse.<sup>962</sup> People under taboo are excluded from sacred places, and even from ordinary society.<sup>963</sup> He is mistaken, too, in thinking that taboo is at the basis of ancestor-worship and morality. Bantu ancestor-worship and morality are both based upon the will of the ancestors. Taboo also may be based on the will of the ancestors, but we have no evidence that it is: all that can be said with certainty is that taboo, like all ancient and important customs, is now thought to be defended by the spirits of the ancestors.<sup>964</sup>

The authority of the head of a Bantu family or tribe is nearly always of a sacred character, as Le Roy says; but his sacredness is due to the fact that he is priest of the spirits of his ancestors. He has no direct dealings with God.<sup>965</sup> If he "has been enlightened by a dream, forewarned by some inner or external notice, instructed by some experience", he attributes that, not to God, but to the spirits of his line.<sup>966</sup> If, therefore, taboos are nothing more than interdicts solemnly pronounced by the religious head of the community, they must be regarded as recognitions of the just rights of ancestors, not of God. But is that what they are?

I cannot find in Le Roy or any other writer a single clear in-

<sup>960</sup> See SB. 421.

<sup>961</sup> E. g., seed-corn and holy water; see SB. 221f., 223, 224.

<sup>962</sup> See my p. 179.

<sup>963</sup> See e. g., pp. 124-7, 175, 257.

<sup>964</sup> Cf. SB. 207f., 211, 214, 218, 385f.

<sup>965</sup> Bantu belief in a Supreme Being will be examined in a future volume.

<sup>966</sup> Personal taboos sometimes originate in dreams. One of Callaway's Zulu informants, speaking of a man who is troubled with daily dreams that he does not understand, says: "At length he becomes ill; and there is certain food he is obliged to abstain from, being told in his sleep not to eat such and such food. If he eats it from opposition, his health suffers. At length he leaves it alone, saying, 'A spirit has visited me.'" (RSZ. 183.) It is likely that the religious head of a community is sometimes similarly moved by a dream to issue an interdict, though I cannot recall an instance of that kind; but if so, he would explain his action by saying that some spirit had warned him in a dream that this particular thing is taboo to his group. In such a case, the interdict would not be the taboo: it would be called forth by the discovery that something hitherto held blameless is really taboo to this group.

stance of the imposition or removal of a taboo in Bantu Africa.<sup>973</sup> The nearest approach to the *removal* of a taboo is that mentioned by Hobley.<sup>967</sup> He states that a Kamba man can release himself from the parent-in-law taboo by providing a feast for the village from which he brought his bride and publicly presenting his father-in-law and mother-in-law with a blanket apiece. This seems at first sight to be an abnormality in Bantu practice; but some tribes hold that this particular taboo does not apply after the first (or second) child is born or after the consummation of the marriage has been formally acknowledged by both the husband and the parents-in-law;<sup>968</sup> and the feast and presentation of blankets may be the conventional Kamba method of publicly recognizing the consummation of the marriage. There are instances not a few in which the laying of a curse or the weaving of a spell has been mistaken for the imposition of a taboo. Le Roy himself has made this mistake. "Along the Ogowe River," he writes,<sup>969</sup> "before the Europeans established freedom of navigation, the chieftains on its banks opened or closed the river *ad libitum* by imposing or removing the interdict. When the river was closed, it was impossible for any canoe to set out: the Ogowe was *orunda*<sup>970</sup> and no native would have ventured on it for anything in the world. But the interdict could be raised: it was simply necessary to pay the price." Wilson mentions a similar practice on the coast. He says<sup>971</sup> that though vessels touching at ports between Cameroons and Mossamedes are expected to make presents to the kings, "the king has no power to compel the captain to pay it, except by interposing a *fetich* to prevent his people from trading with him, and this is always effectual enough." Wilson's phrase, 'interposing a *fetich*', is as obscure as Le Roy's 'imposing an interdict':<sup>972</sup> but he does tell us on another page<sup>974</sup> that a *fetish* is a charm of some kind, and

<sup>972</sup> According to Bushongo mythology, Bumba, the Chembe gave taboos to the various communities when he created them. OTB. 124f., but are the many creators that appear in various Bantu legends anything more than original ancestors of Bantu communities?

<sup>967</sup> AK. 103.

<sup>968</sup> See my pp. 168f.

<sup>969</sup> RP. 151.

<sup>970</sup> *Orunda* is the Mpongwe word for 'taboo' (RP. 145).

<sup>971</sup> WA. 277.

<sup>972</sup> For my criticism of the term '*fetish*' see SB. 313-328.

<sup>974</sup> WA. 211, quoted in SB. 318.



that "sometimes they are made for the express purpose, and are commissioned with authority to put any man to death who violates a law that is intended to be specially sacred and binding."<sup>975</sup> Spells and charms of that kind are in common use all over Africa; but they are not taboos, though their effect is much the same upon transgressors.<sup>976</sup> If Le Roy had described the process of imposing or removing an interdict, it would probably be apparent that he had mistaken the laying of a curse or the weaving of a spell for the imposition of a taboo.

Weeks falls into the same error. In his book on the Boloki, he applies the term 'taboo' to "prohibitions and restrictions put on things by the witch-doctor during and after an illness, by the family totem, and temporarily by the individual himself."<sup>977</sup> The last clause is clarified a page or two later,<sup>978</sup> where we are told that a man sometimes invokes a curse on his own head if ever again he eats food cooked by his exasperating wife, or if he eats a specified dish or visits a specified village till a sick relative is better. Such a vow or self-imposed curse is called *mungilu*, but taboo of the family totem is *mokumbu*. In his book on the Bakongo, he says:<sup>979</sup> "Taboos may be divided into two classes—the inherited taboo (*mpangu*), and the personal taboo (*nlongo*): the former is always permanent, while the latter is often temporary." And he explains that what they call *nlongo* and he calls 'personal taboo' is a curative or prophylactic restriction that is temporarily or permanently imposed upon a patient by the 'doctor', and that *nlongo* is used in some districts as equivalent to *konko*, which denotes a supposedly beneficial restriction imposed upon a town or a person by a chief or a medicine-man and removed when it has served its purpose. Now the discriminating nomenclature that runs through Bantu vernaculars ought to warn us not to imperil our understanding of the Bantu mind by making our word 'taboo' cover all sorts of restrictions and prohibitions that have spirit-sanctions behind them. *Ngili* (the curative or prophylactic restriction imposed by a 'doctor'), *mungilu*

<sup>975</sup> WA. 213.

<sup>976</sup> See my pp. 1084-88.

<sup>977</sup> ACC. 294f.

<sup>978</sup> ACC. 298f.

<sup>979</sup> APB.245.

(a vow), and *mokumbu* (taboo of the family totem) stand for separate notions in the Boloki mind; and so do *nlongo* or *konko* and *mpangu* in that of the Bakongo; and we part company with Native thought when we lump them all together as taboos, even though we divide taboos, as Weeks does, into two classes, inherited and personal or permanent and temporary. Nay, more, we must recognize that Natives sometimes use words that undoubtedly mean 'taboo' in a loose or metaphorical sense. For example, I have heard Becwana apply their term *seila*<sup>980</sup> to actions and expressions that they deemed disreputable, without intending to class them with taboos; very much as we say that something or other is tabooed in polite society.

#### CURSE AND TABOO

The Bantu believe that they are surrounded by unseen beings who take cognizance of their words and actions and often act accordingly, but know nothing of their unuttered desires. To dramatize an event, they say, is likely to bring it about, whatever the actor's intentions may be.<sup>981</sup> And, since carelessness may be as harmful as evil designs in such a powder magazine, prudential precepts for the prevention of disaster are widely disseminated, and called taboos. These are all soaked in sympathetic magic, as the following specimens show. Most of the examples that I shall submit were given me by Becwana tribesmen; but they are found in all Bantu communities.

You must not come out of a hut backward; for the first bearer to emerge with a corpse comes out in that manner, and so does the man who has taken a flaming torch into a hut to purify it after the burial of its owner; and it is wrong to put such things into the minds of the spirits. You must not strike the wall of a hut with your hand or your head, even unintentionally: it would suggest knocking a hole through the wall, and that is never done except for the removal of a corpse.<sup>982</sup> For the elucidation of the last remark, I cannot do better than quote Hobley, premising, however, that among the Becwana the hole in the wall is not

<sup>980</sup> See my p. 197 and cf. p. 183.

<sup>981</sup> Students should read Chapters II. & III. of *Ancient Art and Ritual*, by Jane Ellen Harrison.

<sup>982</sup> See SB. 69.

limited to strangers. "If a stranger comes to a Kikuyu village and dies in a hut there," he writes,<sup>983</sup> "the hut is completely abandoned if the owner belongs to the Kikuyu guild; a big hole is broken away in the side of the hut . . . ; the corpse is left inside and the hyenas come and carry it off. The hut is then left to fall into ruin, and nothing is removed from it, such as cooking pot, beer, jars, etc. The men who break the hole in the wall are even considered unclean, the same as if they had handled the corpse, and after performing the duty go straight off into the bush and stay there until they have bathed and been anointed with *tatha* (the stomach contents of a sheep); finally a very old woman comes and shaves their heads, they are then ceremonially clean and can return to their families." To resume our selection of mimetic taboos; you must not take a flaming stick or wisp of grass into a hut: it would suggest the purification of that hut by the flaming torch after the burial of its occupant. Carry in a few live coals in a potsherd if you want to kindle the indoor hearth on a cold evening. "It is taboo to take a firestick from the hearth and carry it into another house," so the Baila told Smith<sup>984</sup>; because "should this be done the lady of the house would *shikula*, that is, get out of favour with her husband and be divorced." In their ritual for providing a substitute-wife, the Baila carry a flaming brand into a widower's hut and light a new fire with it; and it is significantly stated that the fire is new and the woman also becomes new.<sup>985</sup> If we could dig deep enough, we might find this taboo rooted in some such association of ideas. So, too, with the Bakongo notion that stepping over a person's legs brings him ill-luck and must be carefully avoided:<sup>986</sup> that is the final rite of purification for Bakongo widows and widowers.<sup>987</sup> But let me select a few more Becwana taboos that were explained for my benefit by the people themselves. You must not dig a pit in a cattle-pen; because it would suggest a grave for the owner of the herd. You must not sit on your father's stool, nor on the grindstone that he often uses as a

<sup>983</sup> JRAL, 1911, p. 408.

<sup>984</sup> IPNR, i. 142.

<sup>985</sup> IPNR, ii. 60-62.

<sup>986</sup> APB, 253.

<sup>987</sup> See my p. 209.

seat; that seat is his prerogative as long as he lives, and if you sit on it you are suggesting that the spirits should take him out of the way and leave the seat vacant for you.<sup>987</sup> You must not use a fly-flap that is made from the tail of an ox, or your cattle will die—the spirits will take the beasts in order that you may have the tails.<sup>988</sup> You must not wear your cloak inside out, that is, with the fur showing; nor drink (we should say 'eat') the marrow of the shinbone of an ox; nor eat with your left hand; nor go about wearing only one sandal. These are all things that widows and widowers do during their period of mourning; and if you do such things, you are suggesting to the spirits that they should take away your spouse and make you a widow or widower. Hobley found similar notions among the Akamba. "A woman must not shave her hair while her husband is on a journey: if she does she will be accused of bewitching him. . . . This prohibition is said to be connected with the custom by which a wife shaves her head on the death of her husband, and were she to do so while he is travelling, it might possibly bring him ill-luck."<sup>989</sup>

Most of the instances here produced happen to bear on death, but many mimetic taboos aim at warding off other evils. No woman may eat the flesh of a cow that has died of parturition, or she will die in childbirth; and the interfusion of personality between husband and wife is so pronounced that she will meet with the same fate if her husband eats it.<sup>991</sup> A pregnant woman must avoid drinking milk from a cow that has given birth to twins, or she will bear twins. Such a woman must not eat wildebeeste, so the Lumbu say, because wildebeestes have ugly faces and are slow in bringing forth their young; nor hartebeeste, because that antelope gives birth to blind calves; nor pig, for its sucklings have ugly eyes and snouts. And her husband is subject to the same taboos. Among the Baila, neither a pregnant woman nor her husband may eat goose, or their child will have a long neck; if she eats food that has been allowed to stand over from one day to the next, she will suffer from protracted parturition;

<sup>987</sup> SB. 290.

<sup>988</sup> You may use such a fly-whisk with impunity if you are a very old man; for both men and women who are so old that they are practically sexless are immune from many taboos that are dangerous to other people.

<sup>989</sup> BBM. 161.

<sup>991</sup> Cf. pp. 128f., 133, 242ff.

and if she turns back when about to pass through a doorway, her child will do the same when it comes to be born.<sup>992</sup> The Becwana say that a person must not sit with chin in hand; for that is the attitude of sorrow, and sorrow is sent to all who beckon for it.

My Becwana pundits declared that a few mimetic taboos are due to play on words. For example, you must not take a firebrand into a courtyard, or the people within will quarrel. 'Firebrand' is *serumola* in their vernacular, and 'to quarrel' is *go rumolana*.<sup>993a</sup> You must not eat the overflow of the porridge-pot, or you will never be married. The crucial word in this maxim is *go hapoga*, 'to turn aside', 'to go astray'. I cannot hit upon an exact English translation that brings out both the meaning and the word-play; but it comes to this, "If you eat the overflow of the porridge-pot, you will be the overflow of the marriage-market." Weeks mentions that the Boloki word for very bad rheumatism is *yambaka*, and that persons suffering from this complaint must not burn the wood of a tree called *lobaka*, or the pain will become more acute.<sup>993b</sup>

These protective precepts are called taboos by Bantu tribesmen, being regarded as laws of avoidance that are fortified with spiritual penalties; but they differ from other taboos in that they revenge themselves, not of necessity upon the taboo-breaker, but upon the person indicated by his act. This distinctive feature shows them to be akin to both the spells of the magician and the curse of the ancestor-worshipper, and justifies us in asserting that they are curses of the dumb-show variety soaked in sympathetic magic. Some of them are reflexive, it is true; but then so are some curses. What are oaths and vows, for instance, but reflexive and conditional curses?

Curses are known and dreaded in all Bantu tribes. They are regarded as calls for supernatural vengeance upon specified people, and are expressed in words, or gestures, or more frequently a combination of dramatic action and impassioned speech. If the victim (or cursee, as Carlyle would have called him) is present, he is likely to be pointed out in person; but an

<sup>992</sup> IPNR. ii. 3f.; See also my p. 123.

<sup>993a</sup> Compare our word 'firebrand: a piece of burning wood; or a person who kindles strife.

<sup>993b</sup> ACC 346.

absent victim is indicated by his name, his belongings, or his doings. The belief is that curses are carried into effect by superhuman beings with whom the curser is naturally or officially connected, or whose support is secured by his use of esoteric formulas or symbols. Any man's curse may bring disaster, unless the cursee is protected by a spirit who is strong enough to make it recoil upon the curser; but the curse of an elder is the more appalling because of his superior standing with the gods of the group; and so is that of a person who is at the point of death, because he will soon be among the gods and sure to see that his wishes come true; while that of a medicine-man is formidable, because he is proficient in the use of formulas and symbols that spirits can seldom resist. Spells are dramatized curses, even when they invoke spirits of things; for magic and religion are not sharply differentiated in the lower cultures.

Although these mimetic taboos are both taboos and curses, there is nevertheless a clear distinction between a curse (whether with or without magical trappings), which somebody calls down upon a particular person, and a taboo, which is thought to be defended by spirits without anybody's intervention. The direct effect of being cursed is the same as that of breaking a taboo: spirits are provoked to cause loss, sickness, or death. And the indirect result is the same; for every tribesman knows the risk of being friendly with a man who is frowned upon by the powers that be. Nobody eats off the same trencher with Damocles, however sumptuous the banquet; the hair is too fragile and the sword too keen. But it will never do to assume that things must be the same if they produce the same result. Any one of a variety of offences may land a man in jail, and, according to Bantu thinking, any one of a legion of misdeeds may exasperate the spirits to take characteristic action.

It was this fallacious assumption that spoiled Hobley's chapter on *The Curse and its Manifestations*.<sup>994</sup> "*Thahu*, sometimes called *nzahu*", he said,<sup>995</sup> "is the word used for a condition into which a person is believed to fall if he or she accidentally becomes the victim of certain circumstances or intentionally per-

<sup>994</sup> BBM. 103-153, cf. JRAI., 1911, pp. 406-457.

<sup>995</sup> BBM. 103.

forms certain acts which carry with them a kind of ill luck or curse. A person who is *thahu* becomes emaciated and ill or breaks out into eruptions or boils, and if the *thahu* is not removed will probably die. In many cases this undoubtedly happens by auto-suggestion, as it never occurs to the Kikuyu mind to be sceptical in a matter of this kind. It is said that the *thahu* condition is caused by the *ngoma*, or spirits of departed ancestors." Hobley began with the result, and on this warp he could weave nothing but a tangled web of taboos, curses, ill luck, omens, and spells or other varieties of homoeopathic magic. But he furnishes us with interesting specimens of Bantu curses.

Speaking of the *kirume* or curse of the dying, he says:<sup>996</sup> "The general idea is that a dying person can put a curse upon property belonging to him, or can lay a curse upon another person, but only upon a person belonging to his family; thus, for example, the head of a village, when dying, can lay a curse upon a certain plot of land owned by him and will that it shall not pass out of the family, and if a descendant sells it, his speedy death is said to follow." "If the head of a family feels that he is nearing his end he assembles his sons, and to the eldest he will probably say, 'The goats belonging to such a hut shall be yours'; he will then call another son and say, 'The goats of such and such a hut shall be yours, and if any of you break these wishes he shall surely die.' He will then mention a certain *shamba* (cultivated field) and say, 'Such and such a *shamba* shall not be sold, and if this wish is broken the one who sells it shall die.' This operates as an entail on the property which will be passed on from generation to generation; such is the strength of the belief. Upon inquiry, examples may be found all over the country."<sup>997</sup> A case had recently come to his knowledge in which an elder had refused to part with a piece of land that had come down to him "with a *kirume* on it", though offered a very tempting sum and

<sup>996</sup> BBM. 145, cf. JRAL., 1911, p. 406. Surely this is not a considered sentence. The curse is not laid on property; the blight falls not upon the land, but upon a person who may make the testator turn in his grave by misusing his bequest. Furthermore, although inheritors of land protected by a curse are naturally limited to the curser's family (in their sense of that term), it is hard to believe that Hobley's tribesmen are so different from other Bantu breeds that they deem themselves incapable of cursing strangers.

<sup>997</sup> BBM. 146.

equivalent land elsewhere.<sup>998</sup> He tells also of dying people who curse a wayward or a wasteful child, an envious brother, a callous clansman, or a brutal husband, and even of a dying son who curses his hard-hearted father.<sup>999</sup>

But curses are uttered also by people who are in the flush of physical vitality. "A malicious person will sometimes, out of spite or in a fit of rage, take up a cooking pot, dash it down upon the ground and break it, saying the words *urokwo uwe*, 'Die like this.'"<sup>1000</sup> Such curses, thought not explicitly addressed to a particular habitant of the unseen world, are no doubt prayers for vengeance;<sup>1001</sup> but often enough the execution of a curse is specially assigned to one of the mighty dead who is brought into the transaction by means of some intimate possession that he left behind.<sup>1002</sup> Kikuyu smiths use the iron bracelet of a dead person for this purpose. "If sugar cane is stolen from a garden, or goats are stolen out of a village by night, the owner often goes to a smith and seeks his aid, taking with him the iron bracelet or necklet of a deceased person. If the smith agrees to intervene, he will heat this in the smithy fire and then sever it with a chisel, saying, 'May the thief be cut as I cut this iron.' . . . It is believed that the thief will gradually become thin and fade away with a terrible cough."<sup>1003</sup>

#### TABOO AND MORALITY

Taboo is a phase of magic; and we shall be better able to pass judgment on magic after hearing the evidence that I hope to submit in another volume; but we can at once form an intelligent opinion about taboo. It is doubtful whether taboo is one of the sources of Bantu morality. Bantu morality derives mainly, if not solely, from ancestor-worship; and it is questionable whether taboo has done more than fortify a multitude of immemorial customs with formidable animistic sanctions. Bantu taboos are not specifically moral: the spirits behind them avenge ceremonial offences with physical calamities—offences that have no ethical con-

<sup>998</sup> BBM. 145.

<sup>999</sup> BBM. 145-150, cf. JRAI, 1911, p. 427f.

<sup>1000</sup> BBM. 115.

<sup>1001</sup> Cf. SB. 369f.

<sup>1002</sup> Cf. SB. 328-333, and my pages 233-36.

<sup>1003</sup> BBM. 171.



tent in our sense of that term. Nevertheless, taboo has ministered to the growth of a sense of social obligation by inculcating the doctrine that certain acts were unlawful and would involve the culprit and his group in inevitable punishment, even if undetected by men. If it is worth while to convince a small child that the commands of a superior and paternal intelligence must be obeyed, even when their reasonableness is not apparent to him (an educational dictum that is not yet superannuated), then, surely the fact that people learned to hold themselves bound by taboos that they attributed to the superior intelligence of their progenitors and did not understand was not without value in the childhood of the race. At that stage of human culture, when individual thought was puerile and public authority weak, it was of advantage to society that unbridled men should be taught self-restraint by commands so imperative that appetite was dumb before them and passion held in leash. The taboos are non-moral, it is true; but the non-moral element of outward obedience to 'law and custom', of which taboo is a part, seems to be the soil in which the moral consciousness of the Bantu grew; and the sense of forensic liability did much to stimulate the growth of conscience.

The theory that taboo has fostered the conception of the rights of property, including wives, could never spring from acquaintance with Bantu culture. Property rights are customary in that archaic civilization, though their conception of them seems strange to us, and taboo fences round many old customs with terrors from the unseen world; but the connection between taboo and property rights is casual and slender.

#### TABOO AND RELIGION

If religion is the recognition of supernatural powers and of man's duty to obey them,<sup>1005</sup> then taboos, however unreasonable from our standpoint, contain the germ of religion. All taboos, in varying measure, touch their thralls with a sense of awe in the presence of the unseen, and summon them to obedience. Taboos take their rise in animistic perception that man is by constitution related to the unseen, for they are animistic acknowl-

<sup>1005</sup> "All *akyiwadie*, hateful things (the ashanti word for taboos), were enjoined on man by *Nyame*—the Supreme Being," said an Ashanti priest to Rattray. (RAA. 14.)

edgments that unseen beings are concerned with man's behaviour. Reverence seems to be no farther away from this embryonic notion than an oak tree is from an acorn, except that the beautiful growths of the human spirit take very much longer to mature.

The unseen powers behind most taboos seem to be spirits of things; but the Bantu feel that social and political regulations, moral maxims, taboos, and tribal rites are all inextricably interwoven into the fabric of tribal 'law and custom', and that the tutelary gods of family, clan and tribe watch over this fabric with unsleeping eyes. Hence, ancestral spirits, who are directly interested in taboos that affect fertility, are also indirectly concerned with all other taboos; and obedience to the whole social order is the condition of safety and peace for the individual and the community.

In Old Testament times, holy things and unclean things were both regarded as contagious and taboo. "Holy and unclean things have this in common", writes Robertson Smith,<sup>1004</sup> "that in both cases certain restrictions lie on men's use of and contact with them, and that the breach of these restrictions involves supernatural dangers. The difference between the two appears, not in their relation to men's ordinary life, but in their relation to the gods. Holy things are not free to men, because they pertain to the gods; uncleanness is shunned, according to the view taken in the higher Semitic religions, because it is hateful to the god, and therefore not to be tolerated in his sanctuary, his worshippers, or his land. *But that this explanation is not primitive* can hardly be doubted when we consider that the acts that cause uncleanness are exactly the same which among savage nations place a man under taboo, and that these acts are often involuntary, and often innocent, or even necessary to society." The facility with which uncleanness dissolves into holiness in the phantasmagoria of taboo, is not so manifest in Bantu religion as in Semitic, because the former has not developed to anything like the same extent; but the tendency towards this change is certainly at work. The totem is taboo to its human kindred; but the general tone of conversation concerning it suggests holiness or sacredness rather than uncleanness. The stringent taboos with

<sup>1004</sup> RS. 446, see also 152 & 425.

which Becwana Puberty-camps are guarded do not come into force till the tribal expert has fenced off the camp with occult rites; they cease when the camp and all that it contains, including the regalia of the neophytes has been consumed with fire 'lest it should be contaminated by contact with the uncircumcised'; and yet men who have been initiated in a particular camp will either refrain from crossing the site in future years or will cross it with due precautions. This suggests sacredness or holiness rather than uncleanness; and the probability is that the rites by which the camp is constituted amount to a primitive consecration ceremony. To take another example, a grave is taboo, and everything that touches it becomes in turn taboo, the idea being evidently that of uncleanness; but if one enquires why a pot of beer placed thereon is safe from the predatory and the drouthy, one is told that it belongs to the spirit whose shrine lies beneath that sod, and whose ability to avenge itself upon desecrators is undoubted. Here all the elements of taboo are still present, but the idea of uncleanness is passing over into that of sacredness. In various parts of Bantu Africa one finds groves, hills, and caves in which great chiefs or even whole dynasties lie buried,<sup>1006</sup> and which are, of course, taboo; even bold, bad men are not so rash as to intrude within their precincts; but visitors who bring presents and seek guidance at these shrines are introduced with due formalities by custodians whose lineage or orders give them free access to the gods beneath. At the back of such taboos there is evidently a dim idea of sacredness, rather than uncleanness. It is, however, a mistake to assume that whatever is taboo is by that very fact sacred. "Among the Wa-nika the hyena is a sacred and respected animal. This is because the Wa-nika leave their dead on the surface of the ground; the bodies are eaten by hyenas which thus incorporate the spirits of the ancients." So writes Le Roy,<sup>1007</sup> without justifying or explaining his use of the phrase 'sacred and respected'; and till we are possessed of facts which demand such interpretation, we must take leave to challenge its applicability.<sup>1008</sup>

<sup>1006</sup> See Chap. I.

<sup>1007</sup> RP. 176-77.

<sup>1008</sup> No investigator of Bantu thought can afford to neglect Le Roy's *Religion of the Primitives*; but its *ex cathedra* utterances and scornful invective, the latter a

## TABOO AND CHRISTIANITY

Ignoring for the moment the formative principle of taboo, and viewing the prohibitions from a Christian standpoint, that which strikes the eye is their great unevenness of quality. Some taboos are harmless enough, though useless; some, are mere laws of etiquette; some, involve immoral acts, such as the killing of abnormal infants, or uncircumcised people who have accidentally violated the sanctity of puberty-camps; some, especially those which refer to women between puberty and menopause, prevent the growth of healthy social tendencies; and some taboos of pregnancy and childbirth imperil parturients and infants, the very people that they profess to guard. Taboos of wholesome and valuable articles of food are economic blunders. Taboos that require the destruction of valuable property upon the ground of imaginary defilement, are also indefensible; for fear that a house may have to be demolished or abandoned on account of death-taboo, occasions the reprehensible removal of invalids to some dilapidated shanty that can be sacrificed without loss, and deters the building of those more permanent and commodious homes which are essential to the progress of the people in sexual morality and in much besides. Some rites of purification, such as those for widows and widowers, are repugnant to Christian morals; some, demand sacrifice to ancestor-spirits;<sup>1009</sup> and some, belong to the category of 'chips in porridge.' Purification rites which require the passing on of the contagion to some other person, are condemned by the principle which Jesus enunciated<sup>1010</sup> for the guidance of his followers. Taken at their face value, some taboos appear to be on the side of good morals or of hygiene; but since they were framed by people who viewed life from another angle, their moral or hygienic value is evidently accidental; and the fasting, bathing, medication and fumigation which figure in some rites of purification, have no closer connection with ethics or hygiene than tonsure, holy water, candles,

symptom of intolerance and disdain for men of other opinions, are impediments to students who, whatever their comparative proficiency, are but feeling their way through the gloom that shrouds the innermost shrine of the Bantu soul. As yet, our knowledge of Bantu religion is both deficient and disorganized, and dogmatism is therefore unseemly, especially the dogmatism which bans all dogmas but its own.

<sup>1009</sup> For the relationship of ancestor-worship to Christianity, see SB. Chap. V.

<sup>1010</sup> Matt. vii. 12.

vestments and incense have with Christianity. In teaching hygiene or ethics, however, missionaries who are blessed with the artistic knack of filling out familiar forms with new meaning, may find use for such taboos; as the apostles of a deeper spirituality appear to have found for similar ideas in the old Hebrew religion, though their meaning is not always plain to us.

The attitude of the Church towards individual taboos should be that of careful discrimination. It should oppose all taboos that are contrary to good morals; point out the folly of the foolish ones; help the people to base the good ones on reason; and leave mere conventions of Bantu society to the taste of the people, never forgetting that there is value in obedience to a sense of fitness even when the standard of refinement is at odds with our own.

Taboos are, however, only symptoms of disorder, and it is sheer quackery to match symptoms with drugs. Competent spiritual diagnosticians, who use symptoms in identifying diseases, know that these symptoms are indicative of a pernicious view of the world and will last as long as that exists. What can we do to correct that? We can show our converts that the finer ethical conception of holiness that the literary prophets of Israel cherished, with its positive virtues as well as its avoidance of vices, grew out of ancient Hebrew taboos that were all of a piece with theirs, and that the finer growth was nourished by belief in a personal God who reads the heart, instead of a crowd of lesser spirits who care only for conduct. We can do better than that: we can show them that in all questions of conduct Jesus went straightway to the intention and disposition of the individual, reducing right action to the one principle of love, and teaching explicitly that man is not defiled by contact with external things, but by the bad issues of the heart—malice, slander, deceit, envy, rapacity, arrogance, recklessness, lust, murder. But with our modern advantages we ought to do more. In these last centuries, God has been revealing truths of natural science to men who sought them with diligence and detachment; and even an elementary knowledge of these truths will do more than anything else to rectify that false view of the world from which taboos spring. Nevertheless, we must not expect an easy success. Well-nigh two

thousand years have passed since Jesus shocked Jew and Gentile by setting religion free from taboo and rite and taking it into the open, where the breezes blow and the sun shines; but still thousands of our own folk cling to rites, and shrink from making thirteen at table or marrying in the month of May, while not a few think it more heinous to rob a church than to filch from a widow. Bantu taboos, like our patent nostrums and old wives' remedies, will not disappear till people learn to distinguish between sequence and consequence. Africans who do foolish things in their terror of taboo should be classed, not with evil-doers, but with children who have been threatened with bugaboos till they shriek at shadows.



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